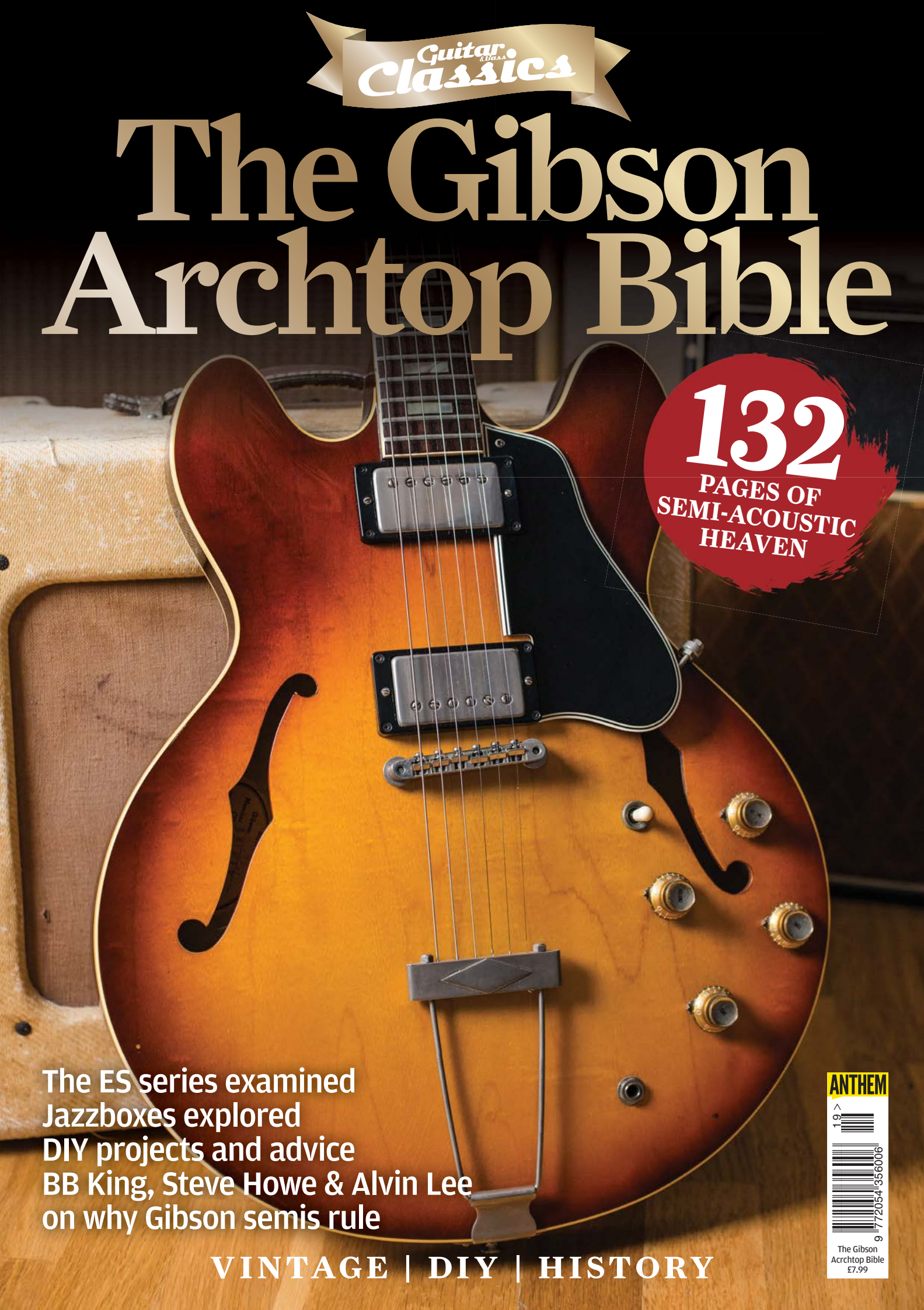
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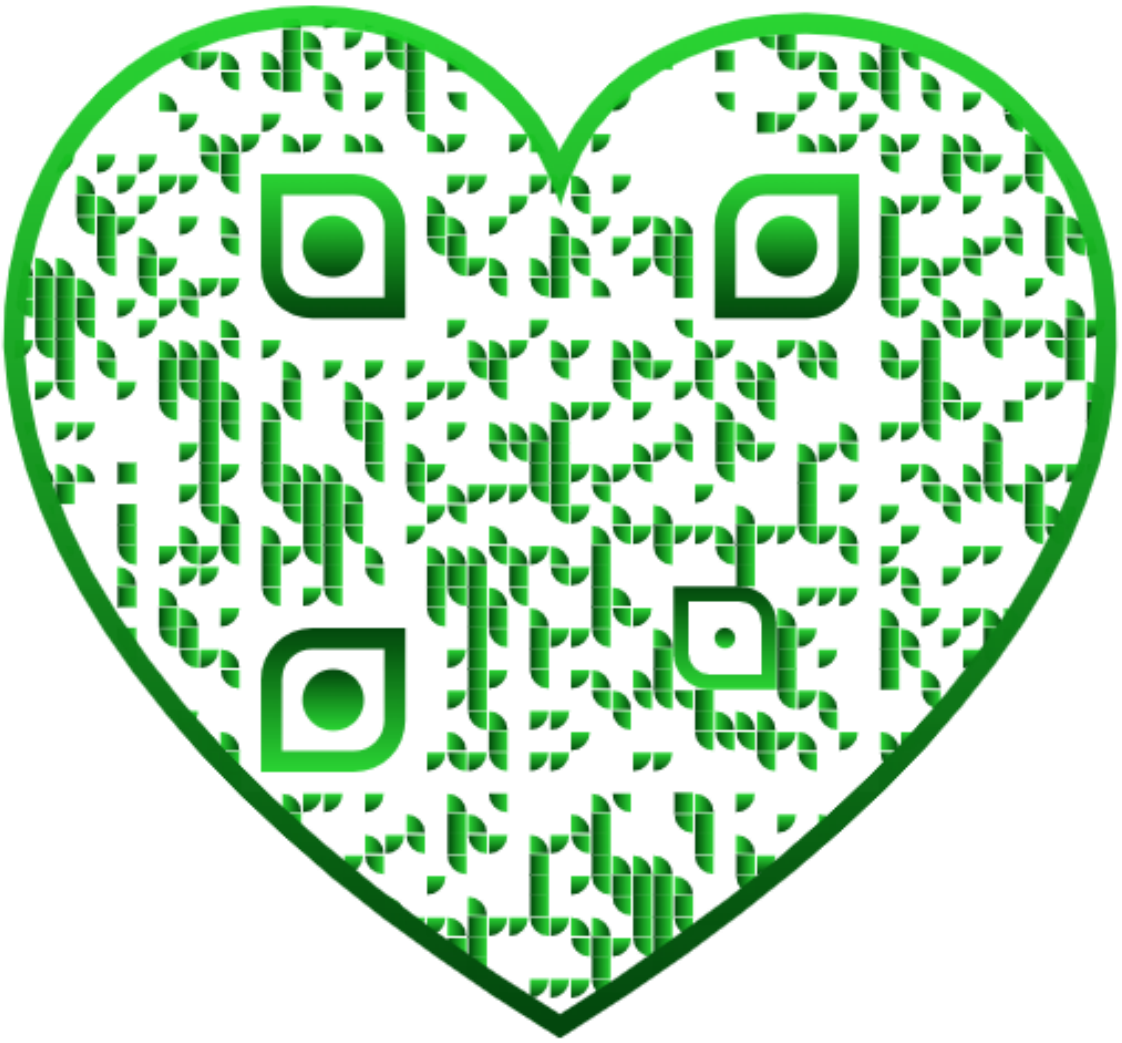

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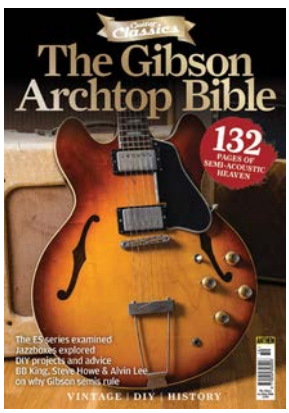
WELCOME

Becoming semi-attached...

Gibson archtops have been at the centre of some of rock 'n' roll's most important recordings and, in the hands of the likes of Chuck Berry, Scotty Moore and Charlie Christian they've been used to blaze a trail and change the course of pop history itself. Whether fully hollow or equipped with a centre-block, there's a certain special something about the sound of a Gibson archtop, and over the years they've proven themselves to be supremely versatile instruments that can find a place in almost any genre.

As an ES-335 player myself, it's hard to be entirely objective, but there's just something about the aesthetic and tone of these instruments that will never stop being thoroughly addictive, and never go out of style. Across the following pages you'll find a blend of features, reviews, interviews and DIY Workshop tutorials that bow down at the altar of the Gibson archtop and help you get the most out of your own beloved instrument.



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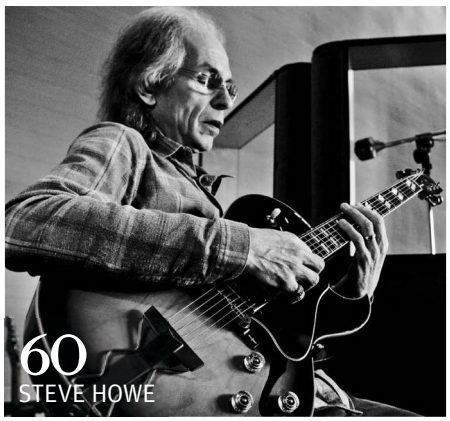

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Swing Time

Gibson's Archtop Guitar

First came Gibson's early oval-holed carved-top instruments, then Lloyd Loar's iconic L-5 of the 1920s, then a wave of electric guitars built on Loar's innovative template. We trace the story of the electric Spanish guitar, also known as the cello guitar, the f-hole guitar and the archtop

57 Gibson
rney Kessel
nature model

A 1964 Gibson Tal Farlow and a mid-'60s Gibson Johnny Smith

Amongst all the famous American instrument companies, Gibson is surely the greatest all-rounder. Over its long history the company has produced banjos, mandolins, steel guitars, pedal steel guitars, harp guitars, ukuleles, basses, tenor guitars and six-string guitars both electric, acoustic and electro-acoustic in almost every imaginable configuration. No other company has lasted long enough to have built stringed instruments that reflect the full spread of developing musical technology and fashion, stretching from the mandolins of the end of the 19th century to the self-tuning, computer-ready rock guitars of today.

Even though Gibson is widely considered to have excelled in a number of different areas – mainly mandolins, flat-top guitars, and electric guitars – there's one field in which it affected the course of history with particularly noticeable strength, and it's these instruments which we'll be paying tribute to over the following few pages: archtop guitars.

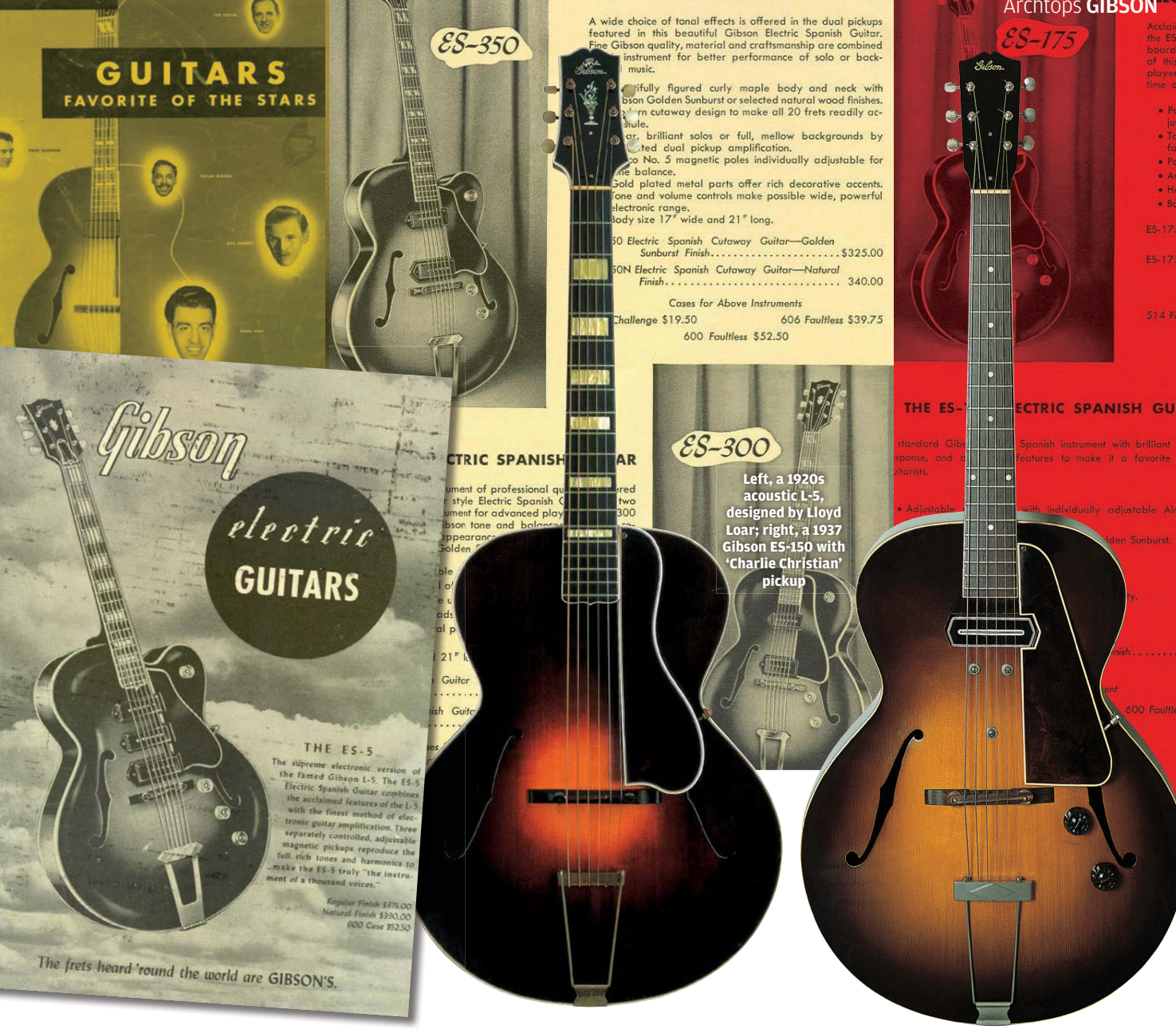
Orville Gibson's invention

It's hard to imagine a world in which the guitar is not the most widely-played instrument of all, but at Gibson's dawn that was exactly the case. In the late 1890s in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Orville Gibson began building his own distinctive mandolins, often tearing apart old furniture to obtain walnut, cedar and spruce, with each instrument often taking a month to build. His fervent belief was that carved and therefore 'unstressed' wood made for better-sounding instruments; he even carved his sides and necks from a solid block of wood, and his instruments would not be hurried... legend has it a Boston company that placed a large order was told that each would cost $100, and delivery would be completed 'in 500 years'.

> Without Gibson's archtop designs, the guitar may never have attained its position in popular music

In 1902 Orville accepted the partnership that formed the Gibson Mandolin-Guitar Co, and though his input soon began to diminish, the new Gibsons began to refine Orville's special method of carving the top, violin-style – a radical departure from the flat-topped and lute-backed or 'tater bug' mandolins that were widespread at the time. Though Orville's guitars and the early oval-soundhole carved-top guitars from the Gibson company are clunky and over-built by the standards of today, they sowed the seeds for the great archtops that would follow.

By the 1920s, the genteel mandolin orchestras that Gibson had furnished with such success were on the wane. Four-string tenor banjos were now fashionable, and guitars were also finding themselves in the ascendency. Finding themselves in danger of being outdone by other quality makers of the time such as Martin, Lyon & Healy, Stromberg-Voisinet and others, Gibson turned to the performer and composer Lloyd Loar, who had joined the company as an acoustic engineer in



Left, a 1920s acoustic L-5, designed by Lloyd Loar; right, a 1937 Gibson ES-150 with 'Charlie Christian' pickup

1919. Loar was in charge of introducing many innovations, and they would all come together with spectacular results with the Gibson series of 'Master Model' instruments, topped by the F-5 mandolin and the L-5 guitar.

The L-5 was the first Gibson archtop with f-holes, and though it included the company's latest developments such as a truss rod and a raised pickguard, it had all of Loar's other innovations built in. Loar completely changed the carving of the tops, making them thinner and more graduated towards the edges, just like a violin. He added two longitudinal tone bars for strength, each of different sizes, and 'tuned' both these tone bars and the actual size of the f-holes for the best acoustic response. He also arranged that the neck should join the body at the 14th fret, a full five years before Martin introduced the great 14-fret Orchestra Model flat-top guitar. The L-5 found fame in the hands of players like Eddie Lang, and would prove to be one of the most influential guitar designs of all time thanks to its cutting tone and surprising volume – for although the regular Spanish-style flat-top guitar was a fine drawing-room picker and a well-regarded tool for song accompaniment, when it came to the matter of delivering the business on stage, it was now in real danger of falling behind. If the archtop guitar hadn't come along, the guitar might never have attained its unassailable position in the history of music.

All that jazz

Though the original L-5 was born just too early for the jazz boom, it served as a blueprint for the guitars that would dominate the scene for the next 30 years. Since an archtop guitar's strings run from a tailpiece over a floating bridge, all the string pressure is downwards – not twisting, as on a flat-top guitar. Add the heavy strings of the era, and you've got a recipe for volume – nowhere near as much as an electric, of course, nor even a decent National resonator guitar, but enough to ensure the guitar's place as a rhythm section instrument in the new breed of jazz orchestras and small, piano and saxophone-based dance bands that emerged in the 1930s. For this, the L-5 suddenly came into its own as the best jazz guitar you could buy.

Though the f-hole style caught on fast – by the early 1930s Gibson's biggest competitor in the jazz guitar field turned out to be the Epiphone company, who soon engaged the Kalamazoo outfit in a race not only to provide an archtop to suit every pocket, but also to make the biggest and the best – Gibson responded by expanding. By 1934 it had the affordable L-50 model, and expanded its 16"-wide L-5 body to 17" in the same year. The company applied this new 'Advanced' body to the new L-7, L-10 and L-12 models, and introduced the huge and spectacular 18"-wide X-braced Super 400 as its top-of-the-line archtop. The Super 400 was the biggest and flashiest guitar you could get, and though its $400 price tag was prohibitive in a time of economic downturn, as a marketing tool it worked perfectly. The Gibson's impressive dimensions were also copies by a new breed of smaller archtop guitar makers, including John D'Angelico, a maker who set up in New York in the early 1930s, and Boston-based maker Elmer Stromberg.

The electric dawn

Not only did acoustic archtop guitars rule >

Left to right: a 1957 ES-125D, a Super-400, a 1955 L-5CES and a 1965 Byrdland

the stages and bandstands of the 1930s, but they also became the basis for the first workable electric guitars. The first decade of the amplified guitar is shrouded in a certain amount of mystery; a few brave souls were experimenting with pickups as far back as the early 1920s, and the first public address system was advertised for sale around 1928.

By 1933, Rickenbacker, Vivi-Tone, Audio-Vox and Vega all had electric instrument/ampflier sets on the market, and Gibson finally broke cover in 1936 with the ES-150 – essentially a standard 16"-wide L-5 design of laminated construction, with a huge bar-magnet pickup sunk into the top.

Almost immediately, a new player emerged to take advantage of the electric guitar's possibilities: a young man from Oklahoma called Charlie Christian, who soon found a job with the Benny Goodman Quintet. Christian's brilliantly melodic lead lines proved that the guitar could project a solo voice equal to the saxophone or the trumpet, and this had a massive effect on a new generation of blues players, including Aaron 'T-Bone' Walker. The electric archtop heralded the dawn of a fresh guitar style, able to combine horn section-like chords with single- and double-string soloing.

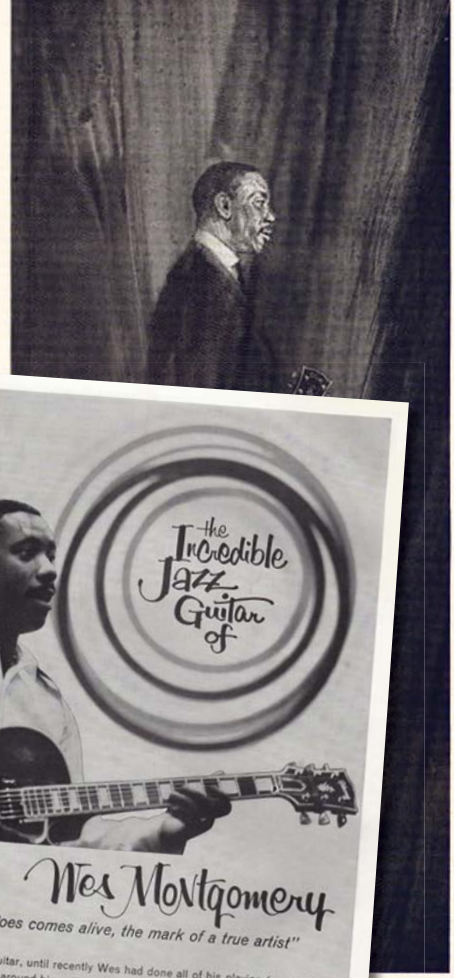
Some traditionalists may have scoffed at the new technology but Gibson knew that even if electrics proved to be a flash in the pan, it had produced something important. Between 1936 and the start of World War Two it came out with the cheaper, 14 1/4"-wide ES-100 and a deluxe model, the ES-250 of 1938-1940, probably the finest pre-war electric of all.

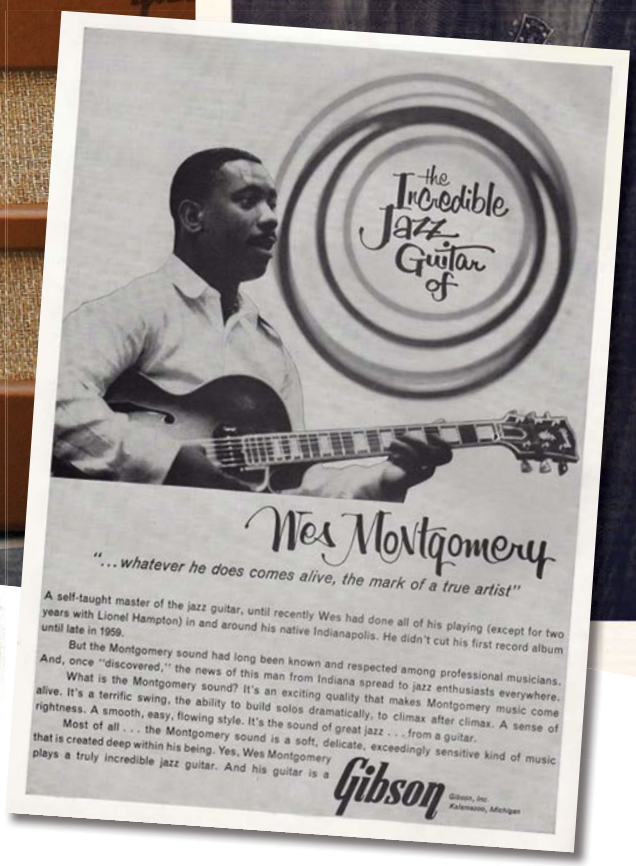
America's biggest guitar makers – save for die-hard acoustic makers such as Martin – returned to production after the war with the realisation that they had to embrace the electric guitar or die. Gibson set about refining its electric line with new pickups, larger bodies and plenty of affordable models. The company abandoned the bulky 'Charlie Christian' pickup and concentrated on finding a compact new unit that could be fitted to a variety of new models. One was the Alnico V, a square-polepiece type, while the other was the simpler, more compact P-90, another single-coil unit. As the P-90 was held in place by just two screws it was impossible to raise or lower it towards or away from the strings, but Gibson eventually offered some small control over string balance by making the polepieces height-adjustable. The P-90 was a success and, fitted to guitars like the ES-125, the remodelled ES-150, the ES-300, the classic single-cutaway ES-175 of 1949 and Gibson's premier electric archtop of the 1940s, the ES-350, it supplied Gibson's signature semi-acoustic tone for the next 10 years.

By now it was becoming more and more apparent that electric guitars were here to stay, and Gibson celebrated the fact in 1949 by launching the ES-5, a fabulous new guitar that neatly covered all the possibilities. Built with a 17"-wide body with a rounded cutaway, the ES-5 was designed to please the old acoustic archtop players with the highest standards of fine construction, including back, sides and top of laminated figured maple. It also came equipped with a startling array of not two but three pickups, all linked to a control system that offered three volume controls plus a master tone control. As it turned out, blues players loved the guitar even more than jazz players: BB King and T-Bone Walker both fell for the ES-5's combination of rich looks and super-warm sound.

The early 50s marked the birth of Gibson's first solidbodies, but electric sales were not yet at the levels of the 60s. Amplified archtops such as the mid-range ES-175 and lower-end ES-125 were often the first port for call for most

A rare Gibson '57 Switchmaster complete with three PAFs





players, while pro players could call on luxury models such as the now pickup-equipped Super 400 or the short-scale Byrdland. When Gibson launched the groundbreaking semi-solid ES-335 and its pricier siblings the ES-345 and ES-355 in the late '50s, our story splits into two because some might claim, justifiably, that these thinlines can't accurately be called true archtops, since their solid centre-blocks allied them in construction terms as much with solidbodies as with their fully acoustic forebears. However, the increasingly successful extra-thin body design was also applied to all-hollow electric designs such as the ES-225, ES-125T and the ES-330.

The great survivor

By the 1950s the era of the acoustic archtop was finally coming to an end. Gibson discontinued the L-12 in 1955 and the L-7 and the L-4 in 1956 (its cutaway sister would last until 1971, as would the L-48), while it dropped the non-cutaway L-5 in 1958; the acoustic Super 400 remained available through the 70s, but few were sold. From now on, the specialised acoustic archtop would pass away from the major makers towards small boutique builders.

Yet Gibson would keep its electric archtops going strongly right through the beat boom and the British invasion into the rock era.

Though electric archtops often meant trouble in the days of increasingly high-powered amps and higher stage volumes,

> The electric archtop heralded a fresh guitar style combining horn-section chords with single-string soloing

they proved popular in the experimental and jazz/fusion arenas with players such as John McLaughlin, James Blood Ulmer, Derek Bailey, John Scofield, John Etheridge and Steve Howe. Gibson also kept the tradition of artist models going with the Johnny Smith, the Barney Kessel, the Tal Farlow, the Trini Lopez Deluxe and the Howard Roberts. There was always the working man's ES-175, while the upmarket L-5CES and Super 400CES were joined in the 70s by new attempts to freshen the format such as the Super V CES, plus slimmer models more suited to the modern day such as the re-jigged ES-350, the ES-175 and the seemingly irrepressible Byrdland.

Today, though solidbodies still dominate the sales figures, Gibson takes care to continue to offer real full-depth electric archtop guitars. You can still buy a richly-appointed Wes Montgomery L5CES, a cutaway Byrdland Florentine, a Super 400CES and L-5CES, an L-4CES, a Tal Farlow, a Lee Ritenour L-5, an ES-5 Switchmaster, a Citation and even a fully acoustic version of the guitar that started it all, the 1934-L5, while Gibson's Epiphone offshoot has always done well in keeping affordable full-bodied archtops in the public eye with models such as the Broadway, Wildkat, Swingster and Emperor Regent.

In terms of guitar design, you might think that the days of the archtop – the guitar that joined the dots between jazz and rock 'n' roll – were over, but with retro music styles such as 50s rock, swing and blues all undergoing a resurgence, there's no need to worry... the archtop, a guitar born 120 years ago, will most likely always be with us.

Gibson
L5

Vintage SHOWCASE

Gibson L-5CES 1955

A cathedral to the art of jazz guitar making, this guitar is one of Gibson's best semis of the 1950s. **RICK BATEY** explains all...

There's something genuinely daunting about the moment you gingerly lift a guitar like this half-century old L-5CES from its case. A poem in hand-carved flamed maple, slathered in Gibson's famous sunburst and topped with a flowerpot-inlaid headstock roughly the size of Monaco, the L-5CES lays down a challenge: either play something worthy, or sit back down. And with a list of L-5CES players that reads like a who's who of the greats of jazz guitar – from Wes Montgomery to the young George Benson and more recently Mark Whitfield – plus rock 'n' roll icons such as Elvis Presley's backup man Scotty Moore, then you've got a lot to live up to.

In the 50s, Gibson realised that with electric guitars now accounting for well over half their sales the risk of seeming faddish was well and truly over, so it could afford to push the boat out and add pickups to the company's priciest and most professional models. Launched in 1951 alongside the even more elaborate Super 400CES, the 17"-wide L-5CES (Cutaway Electric Spanish) was the company's first all-out attempt at building a semi-acoustic guitar to true acoustic specs.

The inspiration for the L-5CES came from Ted McCarty, the saviour of Gibson, who had already laid the groundwork for the company's post-war recovery with the extravagant three-pickup ES-5 and the simpler ES-175, and would go on to drive forward even more outstanding instruments with the Les Paul, the ES-335 and the Flying V. The L-5CES's top wasn't laminated maple, as on the ES-5, but was hand-shaped from fine solid spruce, just like the first Lloyd Loar-designed L-5 of the 1920s. It also came with a perfect rounded cutaway, big pearl block markers on an ebony fingerboard, multiple binding with single-bound f-holes, and a truly massive tailpiece.

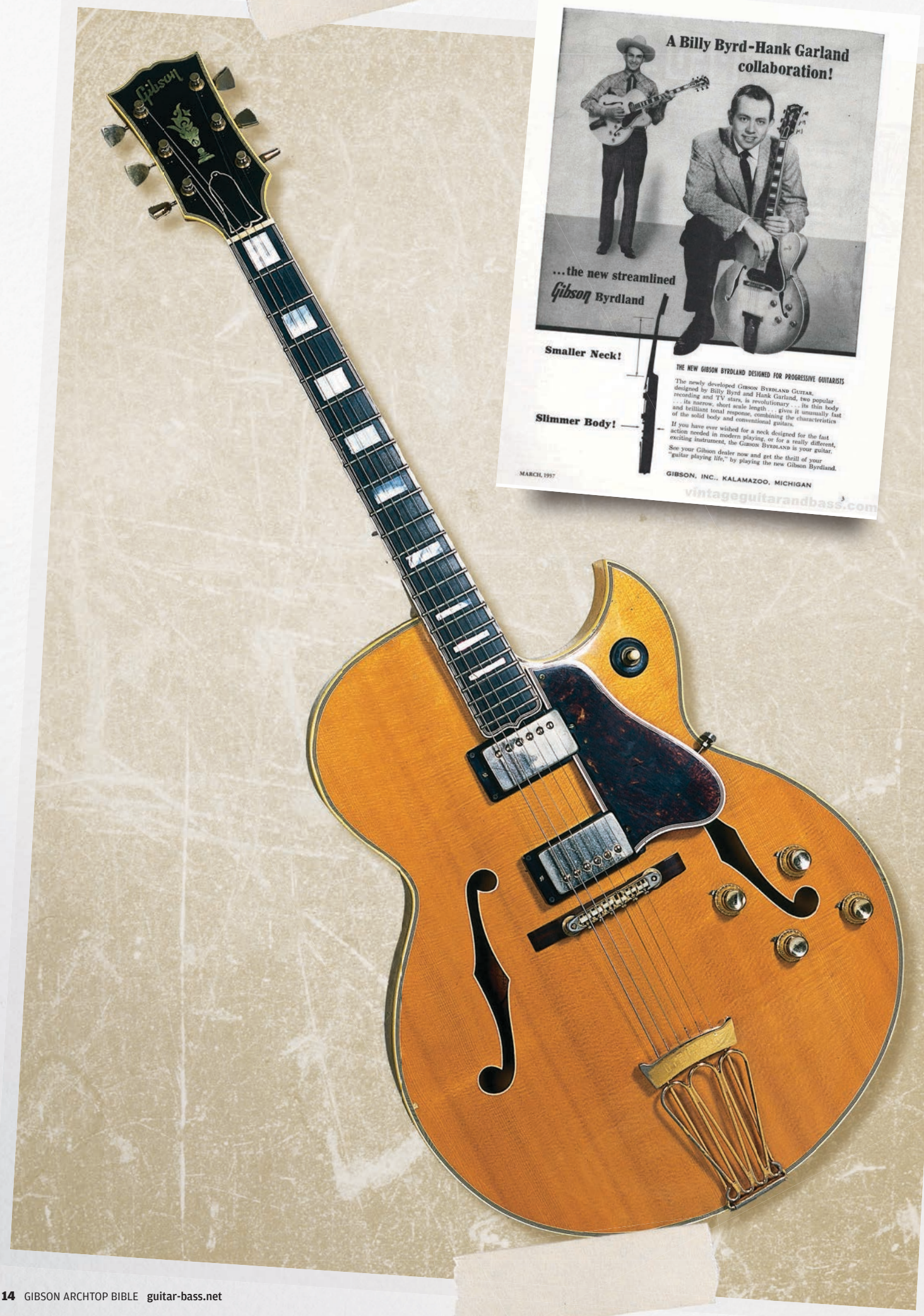
The L-5CES's pickups sound like steroid-crammed Fender single coils: as fat as a pound of lard and as dark as four in the morning

When this new L-5 was launched, Gibson chose to outfit it with P-90 pickups; in 1954 these were swapped for huge, square-polepiece Alnico Vs – Gibson's top-of-the-range units until the humbucker appeared in 1957. These Alnico V pickups sound like steroid-crammed versions of Fender single coils, as fat as a pound of lard and as dark as four in the morning. The solid spruce top adds a warm, funky depth to the tone, and those heavy but slinky flatwound strings atop the deep, chunky neck push your fingers inexorably towards little sliding ninth chords and Wes-style octave tricks.

The electric L-5 is a true semi-acoustic icon. Essentially an old-fashioned guitar even when it was first produced, it marks the last high water mark of the amplified f-hole guitar – at least, until more adventurous makers than Gibson got hold of the concept. It also demonstrates the way the company was seeing the development of the electric guitar before Fender came along with two chunks of wood bolted together and showed that the future could be a lot simpler, a lot louder, and have a good deal more treble. But for all its simplicity and practicality, a Fender will surely never have the presence, the charisma, the gravitas – or the wonderful woody smell – of an L-5CES.

CURRENT MODELS

- **GIBSON CUSTOM L-5CES**, Pretty much as our 1955 example, only the pickups are '57 Classic humbuckers, while the maple/walnut neck has a 20-fret ebony fingerboard. Scale length is 25 1/2"
- **GIBSON CUSTOM WES MONTGOMERY L-5CES**, As above but with a single '57 Classic humbucker
- **GIBSON CUSTOM L-5 DOUBLECUT**, One of Gibson's most recent innovations is the first L-5 double-cutaway. Pickups are Custombuckers, otherwise specs stick with L-5 tradition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Vintage SHOWCASE

Gibson Byrdland 1965

Chosen weapon of a very strange array of guitar players from country picker Roy Clarke to sonic experimenter James Blood Ulmer, the Byrdland is a dark jazz horse...

Introduced in 1955 as the company's first thinline electric, the Gibson Byrdland is the missing link between full-bodied amplified archtops and the slim-profile ES-335. Though a top-quality model from the company's golden age, it fetches less on the vintage market than certain other Gibson jazzers – perhaps just half as much as the top-of-the-line L-5CES, though this '65's blonde finish adds a good 30 per cent.

The design was a collaborative effort that brought together Gibson and two Nashville session players, Billy Byrd and Hank Garland – check their respective surnames to see the inspiration behind the guitar's moniker.

Billy Byrd was a jazzer who turned his hand to country to play with best-selling singer Ernest Tubb. Although he later drove a cab for a living, he continued to play for many decades and died in 2001, aged 81. Hank Garland also had an equally successful career, playing with Paul Howard, Eddy Arnold, Patsy Cline, the Everly Brothers and even Elvis. Tragically, a car crash in 1961 robbed him of the ability to play. Both musicians wanted a comfy instrument that would ease the strain of playing stretchy-fingered jazz chords. Gibson's solution was to take a 17" wide jazz body and squash it to just 2 1/4" deep. They also tweaked the neck, reducing the scale from the normal 25 1/2" down to 23 1/2", narrowing the width just a shade and adding an extra 22nd fret.

It may have been designed for sweet jazz and clean country, but it took a feral Detroit rocker to show that the Byrdland could have an evil side, too

Then they threw in all the L-5's high-level specs, including a solid carved spruce top, figured maple back and sides, miles of binding and an ebony fingerboard with posh block markers – not to mention gold-plated hardware (including Kluson Sealfasts and the brand-new Tune-O-Matic bridge), and a 'flowerpot' headstock inlay. Priced at $550, the Byrdland was just $150 less than the gob-smacking Super 400CES electric. However, it sold well and was quickly followed by a whole new range of thinline archtops: the all-laminated ES-350T, the ES-225T with a trapeze bridge/tailpiece, the three-quarter sized ES-140T and the more affordable, budget ES-125T.

It may have been designed for sweet jazz voicings and clean country licks, but it took a feral Detroit rocker to show that the Byrdland could have an evil side, too. Ted Nugent saw Mitch Ryder and The Detroit Wheels playing a hometown gig around 1960 and was transfixed by the tone of their Byrdland-playing guitarist Jimmy McCarty. The arrow-happy Nugent has played Byrdlands ever since, and has been through scads of them (Gibson once made him a three-pickup special: he disliked it, giving it to a lucky fan in Stockholm). He still owns several dozen, including black ones, a number of custom blondes with special thin lacquer for the best tone and, inevitably, a white one for playing Great White Buffalo.

CURRENT MODELS

- **GIBSON CUSTOM BYRDLAND**
  Classy appointments all over, such as multi-ply fingerboard binding, bound f-holes, ebony fingerboard and triple-loop Byrdland trapeze tailpiece. Pickups are '57 Classic Humbuckers

TIMELINE GIBSON BYRDLAND

1955
Byrdland introduced as a super-thin, short-scale version of the L-5CES. It has a 17" body with rounded Venetian cutaway, solid carved spruce top, solid maple back and sides, three-piece maple neck, ebony fingerboard, gold hardware, including unique looped tubular tailpiece, and Alnico V pickups with altered polepiece spacing to fit narrow neck dimensions. Finishes: sunburst ($550) or natural ($565)

1957
Alnico Vs replaced by humbuckers: guitars from this era are the most sought-after today. A few were made with an Alnico or a PAF at the bridge but with a Charlie Christian pickup in the neck position, just like on Billy Byrd's own guitar

1959
Tailpiece engraved with 'Byrdland' legend

Early 1960s
Round cutaway changed to sharp Florentine cutaway, three-piece neck becomes five-piece, and the two-piece maple back is swapped for a one-piece type. A handful of double rounded cutaway models were made, and stereo-wired examples with Varitone controls also surface every now and then

1969
Cutaway changes back to rounded again, and the back reverts to two-piece

1990s
Transparent red and solid black finishes available. Guitar still in production

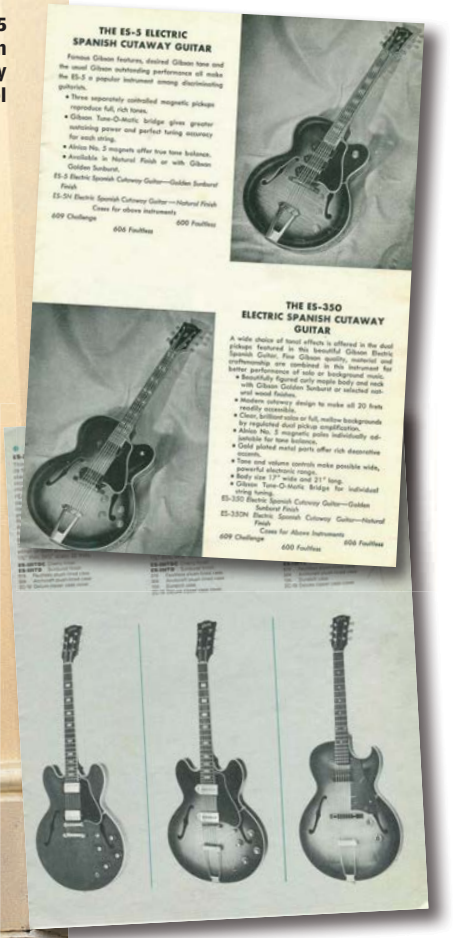
Spanish Armada

Gibson's 'Electric Spanish' range eventually led to one of history's greatest guitars ever: the ES-335. We discover how Gibson's ES-335 melded the best of archtop classicism with the new world of high-volume electric mayhem, and how a modern classic came to be...

Ask any guitarist to name the most classic Gibson, and they'll probably say the Les Paul. Acoustic players will likely laud the Jumbo series (be it a J-45 or J-200). In terms of longevity, however, Gibson's ES guitars take some beating. The ES range encompasses so many different models and styles, they don't always seem like a 'family'... but they are..

ES, as you'll know, denotes 'Electric Spanish'. It's now a somewhat archaic name, but Gibson in the 1930s needed to differentiate designs from their EH (Electric Hawaiian) line of lap steel guitars, which were still highly popular. Gibson wasn't even the first with the Electric Spanish name: that was Rickenbacker, whose 1935 models included the Model B Electric Spanish. But 'ES' would soon become associated with Gibson. For nearly 80 years, Gibson's ES range has been in constant production and has inspired everything from the first guitar solos to blues legends to indie heroes. The ultimate ES probably remains Gibson's ES-335, a contender – surely – for the world's greatest-ever guitar. Here's the story of Gibson's ES magic... >

Launched in 1949, the ES-175 boasts the longest unbroken production run of any electric guitar model



Above, the '54 Gibson catalogue shows an ES-5 and an ES-350; bottom, a '63 Gibson flyer with the stop-tail ES-335, an ES-330TD and the budget ES-125TC

Gibson's ES series began with the ES-150 of 1936, generally recognised as the world's first successful electric guitar. The ES-150's name – like many Gibson models that preceded and followed – simply denotes price: in 1936, $150 bought you the guitar, an amplifier and a cable. Gibson had previously fitted pickups on acoustic guitars in 1935, but the ES-150 was the first specifically-designed electric guitar to make a real impact.

Perhaps surprisingly, it was two retail companies – Montgomery Ward and Spiegel May Stern – who pushed Gibson to design and build the ES-150. Early pickup-loaded L-00 and L-1 models were selling so well that the stores suggested Gibson should offer a new 'proper' electric model. Outside of the blues, jazz bands were still where you'd mostly hear guitar, but mostly as 'comping' chording and as a backup instrument.

The ES-150 changed all that. Gibson still built for Montgomery Ward and Spiegel, but its own-brand ES-150 was a cut above: it had a solid spruce top, maple back and sides, and an adjustable trussrod. In '36-'37, Gibson shipped 40 ES-150s a month – heady stuff for what some then thought of as a gimmick. An electric guitar? Who'd a thunk it?

Count Basie's guitarist Eddie Durham recorded one of the earliest amplified guitar solos, but it was when his friend and follower Charlie Christian picked up an ES-150 that showcase guitar soloing was truly born. Durham later remarked, "I never saw anyone learn so fast, nor have I seen anyone rise to the top so quickly."

By 1939, the prodigious Christian was working with Benny Goodman's bands – his work, with an ES-150, on *Air Mail Special*, *Honeysuckle Rose* and – in particular – the epic *Solo Flight* ushered in the era of the guitar solo. Before long, stores were advertising the ES-150 with the tag 'as featured by Charlie Christian'.

Yet the ES-150 was still essentially a 'jazz box'. It had the outline and deep body of many existing Gibson archtop acoustics, and no cutaway. Still, at the time, it was something of a revolution. Variations followed: the similar-looking ES-125 was a student model, but had a new pickup fitted, which we now call the P-90. The ES-250 (1938-40) was higher spec'd, but didn't last long; the USA was still recovering from the Great Depression, and $250 was the equivalent of $4,000 today. The ES-300 (produced from '40-'52 in limited numbers) was another variation, but odd; early models had a heavily slanted pickup, which is interesting to guitar experts, yet the same experts almost uniformly agree that most ES-300 guitars sound poor.

Nevertheless, these early ES models were finely-built. Nashville guitar expert and dealer

AN ELECTRO SPANISH TIMELINE

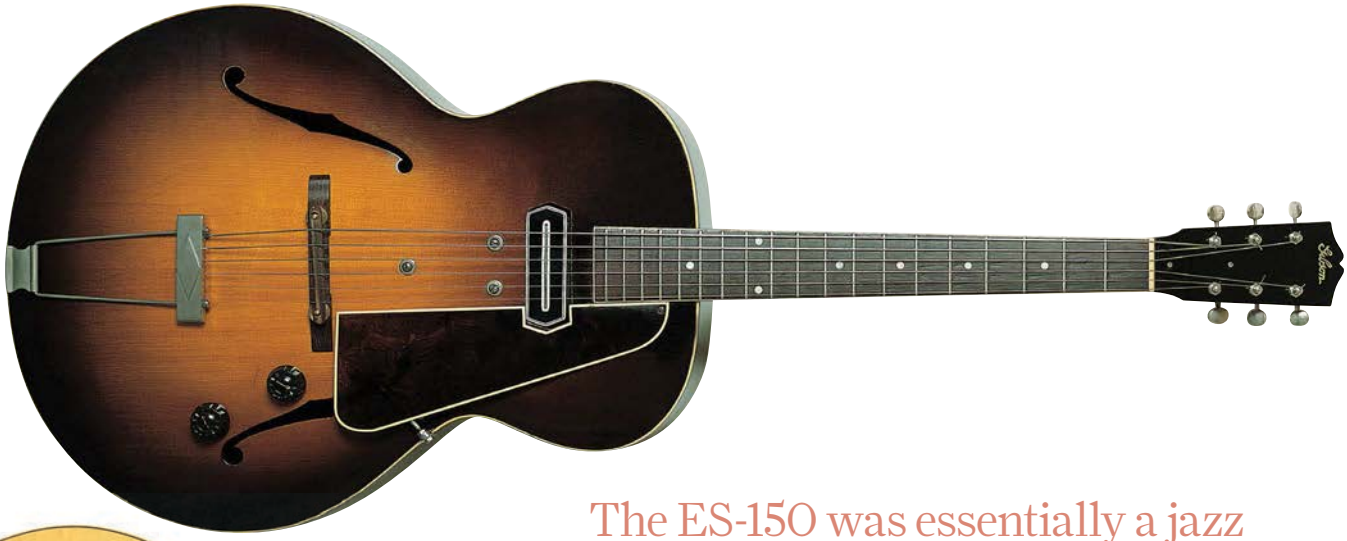
79 years of tone

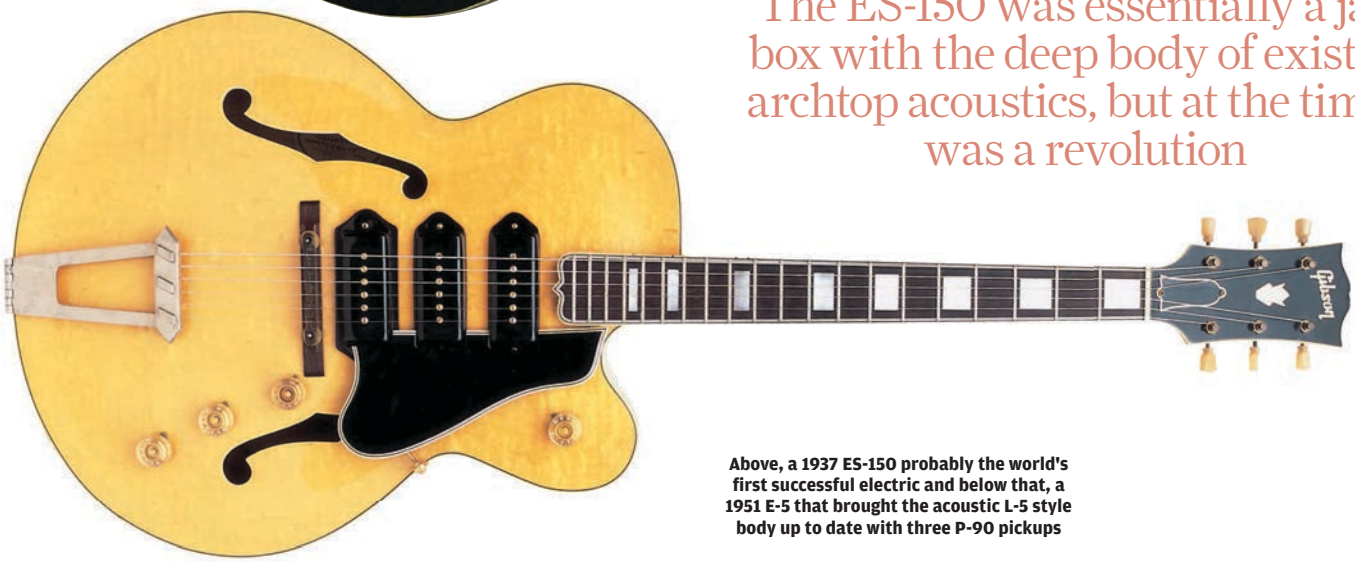
1936
Gibson's first Electric Spanish, the ES-150, is launched and made famous by Charlie Christian. Production halted during WWII and permanently ceased in 1956

1949
The single-cutaway ES-175 introduced (two-pickup models follow in 1952) and is still made to this day. Its gold-finish version, the ES-295, is made famous by Scotty Moore. Three-pickup ES-5 also introduced

1956
'Thinline' Gibson ES-125T debuts. It's still fully hollow, but proves versatile; George Thorogood was known for his playing on a 125TDC (TDC stands for Thinline, Dual Pickup, Cutaway)

1958
New double-cut design the ES-335 (and ES-355 'soft-launched'). Has 'wonder-thin' body and adds the all-important maple centre block. It's the first significant blend of 'jazz' and 'rock 'n' roll' guitars





The ES-150 was essentially a jazz box with the deep body of existing archtop acoustics, but at the time it was a revolution

Above, a 1937 ES-150 probably the world's first successful electric and below that, a 1951 E-5 that brought the acoustic L-5 style body up to date with three P-90 pickups

George Gruhn tells *Guitar & Bass*, "The original Charlie Christian model ES-150 guitar, built from 1936 through '39, is a very fine instrument. The pre-war ES-250 is also highly sought after, and very rare. But the post-World War II non-cutaway electrics, such as the ES-125, while they play well and sound good, tend to bring relatively low prices. Most players want a cutaway."

Indeed, WWII had a bigger impact on guitar makers than you may think. Timber was highly valued and the best wood was used by the US government to build for the war effort. Gibson mainly concentrated on their acoustics with the limited supplies they had. It would be peace time before Gibson really moved its ES range forward.

Post-war revolution

The ES-175 debuted in 1949, and remains a highly significant model in Gibson history. Alongside the pricier ES-350, it was also the first Gibson electric to feature a Florentine (sharp) cutaway. The same year's ES-5 had a round cutaway, and some had three pickups: build-wise, though, it was essentially a variation of the carved-topped L-5 acoustic.

Although the ES-175's first incarnation had only a single P-90 in the neck position, later models (the ES-175D, from '53) came with two pickups. The ES-175 employed a laminated top to keep the price down – so even though it was still 'jazz sized', the 175 was clearly pointing the way to more affordable yet grandly spec'd 'archtop' electrics.

Fender's Broadcaster (later called the Esquire and the Telecaster) also debuted in '49, and it remains fascinating how the two guitar makers' ethos contrasted. Fender's model was an inspired design, for sure, but arguably utilitarian and an 'easy' build of slab wood and wire. The ES-175 exuded Gibson's archtop heritage craft and it looked stunning. The ES-175 also eventually spawned a variation in a flashy all-gold livery, the ES-295. This one boasted a multi-bound maple top, a white pickguard with etched flowers, pearl parallelogram neck inlays and more. And one happened to be in the hands, from 1953-55, of a guitar player backing the hottest new artist in rock 'n' roll, Elvis Presley. Interesting fact: Elvis's Scotty Moore traded in his only-just-bought Fender Telecaster for his famed ES-295: "It might have something to do with it being a feminine shape, but I couldn't get on with the Fender," Moore once recalled. "So I got a Gibson, a gold ES-295, and that was the one I used on the first things we cut."

Alongside Elvis, Moore moved on to other Gibson models soon enough (notably the Super 400), but just the image of Moore with an ES-295 seared eyeballs: Brian Setzer of the Stray Cats has referred to the ES-295 as "the

1959

Interim model the ES-345 also launches with (like 1958's ES-355) a Vari-tone control. A Cherry Red finish, probably the best-loved, becomes available on 335s. Fully-hollow Gibson ES-330 also becomes available

1964

Trini Lopez Standard arrives, a modded ES-335 with old-school trapeze tailpiece, diamond-slash 'f-holes' and inlays and a 'hockey-stick'-style six-a-side headstock. Was discontinued in 1971. Visually, it Was reissued in 2014 and also reworked as the Dave Grohl DG-335 signature

1980

BB King Lucille launched – essentially an ES-355 but with no f-holes and a TP-6 tailpiece. Two volume, two tone knobs, a three-way selector, Vari-tone, and both stereo and mono jack outputs

2013

The ES-330 returns. The ES-330TD is classic-correct with two P-90 pickups and a retro trapeze tailpiece. There is also the ES-390 – another hollowbody, but with mini humbuckers. The ES-390 is essentially a 'new' guitar, but shows the 335 shape and template is adaptable

IS THERE AN ES SOUND?

Gibson's ES models offer a 'woodier' sound than a straight solidbody, but there's pretty much nothing they can't do. If you play in a hardcore metal band, you can leave an ES in the store – but otherwise they've been made famous across a melange of great guitar music.

The first Electric Spanish, the ES-150, is best heard played by Charlie Christian. *The Genius Of The Electric Guitar* (4 CDs) is a superb primer for early guitar solos. Elvis Presley's *Sun Sessions* showcases Scotty Moore's work on various ES's, notably the ES-295. As for other deep-bodied ESs in a later, different context, Steve Howe of Yes recorded much on an ES-175: take your pick from early-70s Yes albums. He's still playing it now: "I consider it essential because it's got a big, fat sound and the chords just sound wonderful."

For blues, head to BB King's post-1961 releases. *Live At The Regal* has BB on a 355 and is a blues classic, full stop. *Freddie King: The Ultimate Collection* has some of him playing a Les Paul, but it's mostly ES-345s.

For blues rock, head to Cream's Farewell Concert on DVD, where you'll see Eric Clapton's 335 playing up-close. Ten Years After's Alvin Lee used his modded 335 throughout his career: for its cover alone, try *Saguitar*.

The Beatles used Epiphone Casinos – rebranded ES-330s. They are all over *The White Album*, particularly by Lennon.

The ES-350T was one of Gibson's first thin-body electrics, this model dates from after 1957 when P-90s were superseded by PAF pickups

Gibson's ES models offer a 'woodier' sound than a solidbody, but there's pretty much nothing they can't do. They've been made famous across a melange of great guitar music

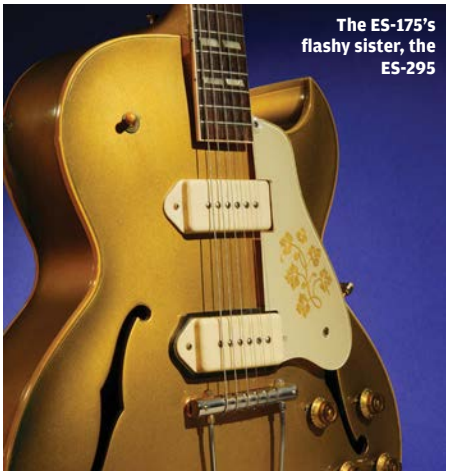
U2's Edge favoured Casinos and Sheratons in the mid-2000s. U2 hits *All Because Of You*, *Miracle Drug* and *Breathe* are played on these 330/335-alikes.

In the 80s, Johnny Marr used a red ES-355 extensively: his '63 Epiphone Casino is the main tremolo sound on *How Soon Is Now*. Johnny later gave Bernard Butler his sunburst '66 ES-335 12-string used to record the Smiths' *Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before*. Butler first used his red ES-355 for most of Suede's *Dog Man Star* album – listen to *We Are The Pigs* for great Bigsby wobbles.

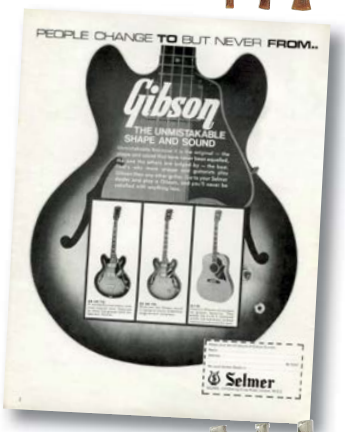
Oasis's debut was mostly recorded on overdriven '70s Epiphone Casinos made in Japan: they couldn't afford 'proper' Gibsons at the time. For the last decade, Gallagher's main guitars have been a '60s Cherry Red ES-335 and a 355. And, of course NG's Supernova signature of the 90s was a modded Epiphone Sheraton (akin to a 335) in Manchester City blue. Dave Grohl's DG-335 is a hot-rodded version of the ES-335 variant, the Trini Lopez, in custom colour Pelham Blue. From BB to EC, Elvis to Alvin, Gallagher to Grohl... it seems the 335 design can sound like anything any player wants.

ultimate rockabilly guitar." The 'lowlier' ES-175 has its own set of fans, across all genres. In 1964, a 17-year-old guitarist named Steve Howe walked into the Selmer music store in London and bought a Gibson ES-175. A hollowbody ES was an unusual choice for a future prog shredder, but Howe has remained faithful to the guitar that has supercharged his career. "The 175 is a brilliant guitar," Howe says. "The parallelogram inlays are beautiful, the whole guitar is beautiful." Back in the 1990s, even legendary guitar collector Howe was having a clear-out. "I've bought a lot of guitars I didn't need," Howe told *G&B*. "I'm selling 45 at the moment. But I've kept my '63 ES-175, which was the first Gibson I bought. I played it continuously for 15 years."

The ES-175 remains a classic. Yes, it was later eclipsed by other ES designs by Gibson,



The ES-175's flashy sister, the ES-295



Although slightly devalued by its Bigsby, this flamed blonde 335 (above) is from the best year and has the most collectablefinish of all. Below: this '60 ES-330 lacks the 335's centre block and the neck meets the body at a different point

but it remains hugely popular. Continuously, from 1949 to 2013, the ES-175 has remained in Gibson's extensive guitar range. It can feed back, it's bulky to some, but the Gibson ES-175 boasts the longest unbroken production run of any electric guitar model.

Boom! The 335 era

By the mid-1950s, Gibson's ES range was well-established and selling well. Gibson had noted Fender's success with the Telecaster and had produced its own solidbody, the now legendary Les Paul Model (the outline of the Les Paul was simply a downsized copy of the ES-175). Yet early Les Pauls of '52 weren't initially massively popular – it seemed Gibson also needed to blend its archtop heritage with the new demand for more rock'n'roll guitars.

Gibson had already built 'slimline' designs – the ES-350T and the ES-225T – with a shallower body, but these were still essentially hollowbody 'jazz' guitars. Gibson design legend Ted McCarty recalled of the now legendary ES-335: "I came up with the idea of putting a solid block of maple in an acoustic model. It would get some of the same tone as a regular solidbody, plus the instrument's hollow wings would vibrate and we'd get a combination of an electric solidbody and a hollowbody guitar."

The ES-335 of 1958 was a breakthrough. With its double Venetian cutaways, it looked less like a jazzer's guitar – but it clearly wasn't a 'simple' Fender, either. Here's a debate: maybe Les Paul influenced the ES-335 more than he did the Gibson Les Paul? Les Paul built his electric guitar prototype, the Log, after-hours in the Epiphone factory in 1940. It was a 4"x4" chunk of pine with strings and a pickup. He sawed a conventional hollowbody guitar in half and attached each curved side to his 'Log' to make it more acceptable to a traditionalist's eye. At the time, Gibson rejected Les Paul's vision. But the idea of a semi-acoustic – solid block middle, with f-holed side chambers – maybe eventually morphed into the ES-335?

The ES-335 (and 345 and 355) is now a bona fide guitar design classic. Its slim body made it easier to play for most guitarists, and it also happened to look stunning. BB King says, "I knew I liked the 335 from the first time I played one. The first one I had was a brown sunburst, and the main thing about that guitar was that the neck was so thin and the body was so shallow, so it was comfortable to play... even back then when I was somewhat slimmer than I am now!"

The 335 also benefitted from Gibson's mid-50s design innovations: Seth Lover's >

A reissue of a 1952 Es-225TD. 'Slimline' but still essentially a hollowbody jazz guitar

Eric Clapton with his red 1964 ES-335 during the Blind Faith era

Photo: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

ground-breaking humbucking pickups and McCarty's ABR-1 Tune-o-matic bridge. These were key in giving the 335 its unique blend of archtop classicism and cutting electric tones. Early after launch, Gibson nicknamed it as having a 'wonder-thin' body. The eventual 17-degree headstock angle increased string tension, too, giving a firmer feel and more attack to notes. At about 7.5lbs, it was easy on the shoulders. As a design, the Gibson ES-335 is arguably flawless.

Also released in 1958 was a high-end version, the ES-355, which came factory-equipped with multiple binding, gold-plated hardware, an ebony (not rosewood) fingerboard, Vari-tone control and an optional Bigsby vibrato (for $355 as opposed to $335). Only 10 were shipped in '58. The Vari-tone is loved by some, dismissed by others: it added various combinations of coils and capacitors to the pickup circuitry of the guitar to add more tonal options to the sound, one with a distinct 'honk'.

In 1959, the ES-355 was upgraded to stereo wiring, and at the same time Gibson debuted the stereo ES-345. This was an 'intermediate' model between the ES-335, and it also came with the Vari-tone. BB King calls the Vari-tone 'the magic switch'. ES-355 fan Bernard Butler says positions 2 and 3 on a Vari-tone are "more Fender Strat or Jaguar-like". Also in '59, there was a fully-hollow version, the ES-330 (later echoed by the Gibson-built Epiphone Casino). Early models, as seemingly with all guitars, can differ.

> 'ES-335s from 1959 are the most sought-after, but any made prior to 1965 with the stop tail and wider nut are collectible'
>
> GEORGE GRUHN

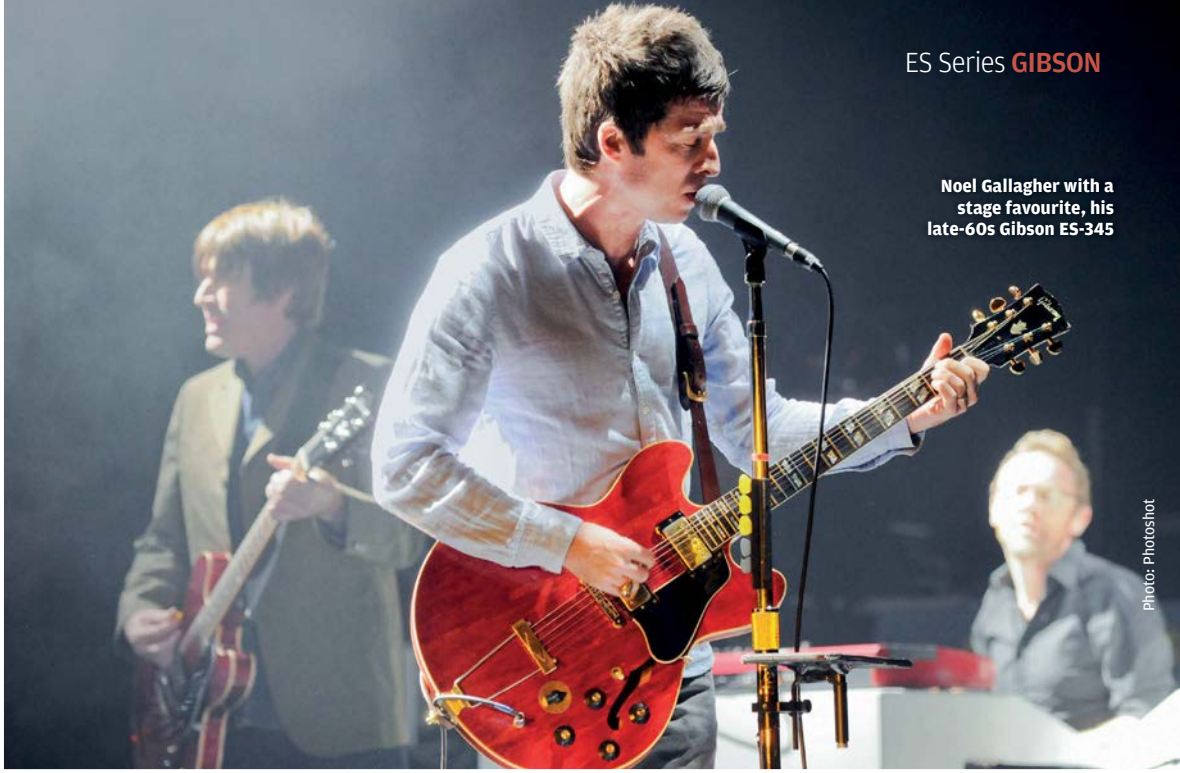
George Gruhn says: "The ES-335, ES-345, and ES-355 remain very sought after by collectors as well as musicians. The fully-hollow ES-330 is less sought after, but it's still a fine instrument.

"To me, the true 'golden age' most sought-after of these guitars were those made in 1959, with the jumbo-size frets and a good neck set angle. Those from 1958 are still very valuable, but have a shallow neck set angle and don't play quite as well as the '59 model. Those made from 1960 onward have a somewhat slimmer contour neck and don't bring as much money as the '59 model.

"But any made prior to mid-65 with the 1 11/16" nut and a stop tailpiece are still sought-after collectibles. One might consider the golden age to be sub-divided into the best being from 1958-1961, when the ES-335 had dot inlays and all the humbuckers had PAF stickers... but all are still quite collectible and very fine instruments through mid-1965."

Variations on a theme

The ES-335 design soon became the basis of other new models. An early example was the 335-style was the Trini Lopez signature, built from 1964. Lopez was quite a major star back then, and had been playing a Gibson Barney Kessel siganture – a double Florentine cutaway akin to the ES-175. When approached by Gibson, Lopez suggested diamond fret-markers, diamond f-holes, the Firebird-style 'hockey stick' headstock and more. The Trini Lopez is an ES-335 in all but name, and has its own fans: Noel Gallagher has a mint 60s tobacco-finish one. Gibson's DG-335 of the 2000s, a Dave Grohl signature, is essentially a Trini Lopez revamped with hotter pickups. It's now Grohl's main guitar... and they all lead back to the original ES-335 design. "Many younger players like my guitar," says Lopez, now 75. "Maroon 5's guitarist plays my guitar, the Edge plays my guitar, Paul McCartney's

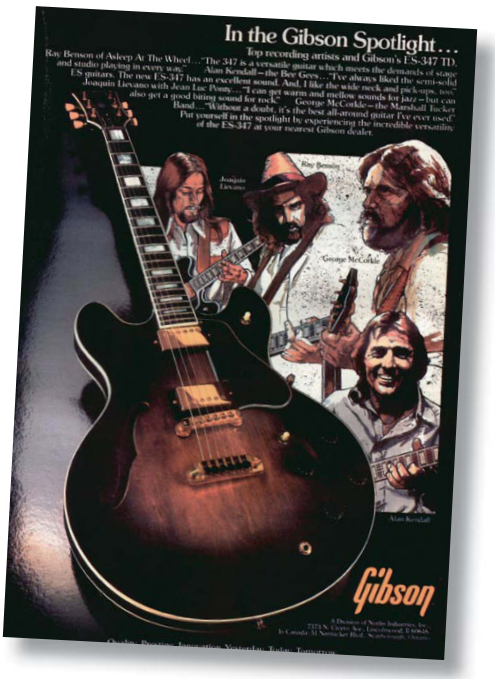


Noel Gallagher with a stage favourite, his late-60s Gibson ES-345

Photo: Photoshot

The Gibson ES-339: all the tone with a little less size

> 'My 1960s 355 is the basis for everything. I've got so many guitars, people just throw things at me, but the ones I bring on tour are 355s or 345s. Those are what I play'
>
> NOEL GALLAGHER



guitarist plays my guitar, Dave Grohl, Lindsey Buckingham of Fleetwood Mac played my guitar, Sting's guitar player plays my guitar. The Edge auctioned his Trini Lopez for $280,000. It's amazing."

The ES-335 design has certainly proved an inspiration to many, and it remains massively versatile. Jazz/fusion player Larry Carlton – who has added his guitar skills to artists as diverse as Steely Dan, Joni Mitchell, The Crusaders and Michael Jackson – is known as 'Mr 335', and his record label is 335 Records. "I didn't own a 335 until 1969," Carlton says. "I had been playing a Les Paul or an ES-175. As I got busier in the studio scene, I really wanted to start carrying one guitar as opposed to carrying three or four. And the 335 was the most versatile, and I was a very versatile player. I could depend on that guitar for the majority of sessions I was doing. It's a great blues guitar, a great jazz guitar also, and I played all of that. And it's a great rock 'n' roll guitar... if you crank it."

The 335 as indie icon

Looking back over more than five decades, 335s to 355s can be found across all genres. Blues legend Freddie King cut his classic *Hideaway* on his ES-345. Eric Clapton played a 335 in Cream (see Famous Thinlines on page 28). The thinline is still a staple of many jazz players, but the glorious design reaches way beyond 'archtop' excellence. It's surely not what Gibson intended, but the ES-335 has also become something of an indie guitar icon. In the 1980s, the Smiths' Johnny Marr often played a vintage Cherry Red ES-355, and that same guitar caused some future stars to embrace the design. Noel Gallagher claims that after seeing the Smiths on Top Of The Pops, he went out and bought a red 335 the very next day. "That's what I want to look like! My 1960s Gibson 355 – that's the basis for everything," Gallagher said in 2011. "I've got so many guitars, and people just throw things at me. But the guitars I bring on tour are either 355s or 345s. Those are what I play."

Bernard Butler was another swayed by Johnny Marr's use of a 355. Influenced by his teen hero, Butler bought his '64 Bigsby-fitted 355 in New York on Suede's first US tour. Tellingly, the name of Butler's own studio these days is Studio 355. Bigsby vibrato-loaded 355s aren't widely coveted, however. George Gruhn says: "All of the hollow and semi-hollow models bring more money in a non-tremolo [sic] version. Those with the tremolo simply don't stay in tune as well."

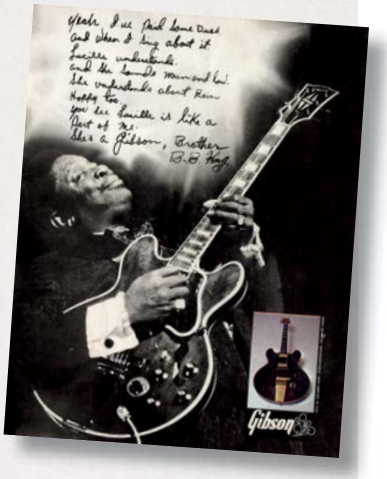
Today, the ES-335-style endures as an indie icon. The Cribs' Ryan Jarman plays a Gibson Memphis ES-335 Dot, while Vampire Weekend's Ezra Koenig favours the closely-related Epiphone Sheraton II.

The 335 influence

From 1936's ES-150 to the ES-335 is a big journey, but it hasn't stopped. The 335 shape is now part of guitar culture. Epiphone, Gibson's sister brand, has its own variations. The fully-hollow Casino (much like an ES-330) was a >

FAMOUS THINLINES

These three titans of blues and rock have all made their 335s icons of the ES range...



BB King's Lucille

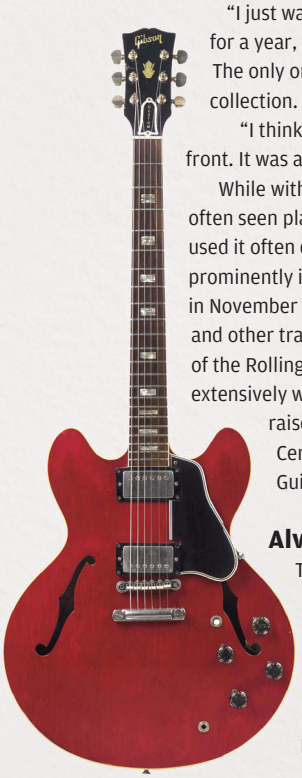
BB's first 'Lucille' was actually a Gibson L-30. He rescued it from a nightclub fire in Twist, Arkansas, and named it after a woman in the club that other men were fighting over. As King's career flourished, he bought an ES-5, then one of Gibson's flashiest and sonically most versatile models with three P-90 pickups. In 1951, King had his first major hit with a cover of Lowell Fulson's *Three O'Clock Blues* – and he was playing a Gibson ES-125. He then adopted a Gibson Byrdland and an ES-175 before moving on again to ES-335s, 345s and 355s, the ultimate 'Lucilles' everyone now associates with him. You can hear the 'honk' of the ES-355's Vari-tone switch's capabilities on King's 1969 classic *The Thrill Is Gone*.

In 1980, Gibson and BB King first collaborated to create his own exclusive Gibson Custom Lucille model. As well as personalised pearl inlays, BB requested that Gibson remove the f-holes, to reduce feedback; in earlier years King would often stuff his regular ES-355's f-holes with cloth to inhibit trouble at high volume. The Epiphone Lucille offers a more affordable option. Featuring a laminated maple body with glued-in maple neck, it boasts a bound rosewood fingerboard and multi-bound body and headstock. With stereo and mono outputs plus the six-way Vari-tone switch, it's classic BB King, but on a budget.

Eric Clapton's 'Cream' ES-335

Clapton bought his Cherry Red Gibson 'dot neck' ES-335 in 1964 and used it throughout his career until it was sold by him at auction in 2004. It became known as the 'Cream guitar' as during his tenure with the band, a roadie stencilled the word 'CREAM' in large letters on its flightcase.

"It was the second electric guitar I ever bought," Clapton remembered. "The Kay got me into the Yardbirds, and then when we started making money I found I had nothing else to spend it on but guitars – a Cherry Red Gibson ES-335, which was the instrument of my dreams. The Kay had been just a poor imitation.



"I just was very focused on a guitar and would play that exclusively for a year, two years and then for some reason I'd go somewhere else. The only one I held on to was the ES-335; it was the oldest guitar in my collection. Well, not the oldest... but the one I had the longest.

"I think the cherry Gibson ES-335 was really acceptable on every front. It was a rock guitar, a blues guitar – the real thing."

While with the Yardbirds, Clapton's bandmate Chris Dreja was more often seen playing it: EC used it more frequently from late 1968 and used it often during Cream's farewell tour of America. It also featured prominently in Cream's farewell concerts at London's Royal Albert Hall in November 1968. Clapton used the guitar when Cream recorded *Badge* and other tracks on the band's *Goodbye* album and during the filming of the Rolling Stones' *Rock And Roll Circus* in December 1968, and also extensively while in Blind Faith (1969). Clapton auctioned it in 2004 to raise funds for his addiction rehabilitation facility, Crossroads Centre at Antigua. Its $847,500 price – paid by the US retailer Guitar Center – is the highest recorded for any ES-335.

Alvin Lee's 'Big Red'

The guitar most-associated with the late great Alvin Lee was his modified Cherry Red 1959 Gibson ES-335. He had a single-coil pickup installed for extra tonal options and it became his trademark, particularly for its heavily stickered body, after Ten Years After's barnstorming performance at Woodstock in 1969. Gibson has honoured Lee's 335 legacy with a signature replica.

favourite of the Beatles. John Lennon played one regularly: when Paul McCartney played Beatles guitar solos (*Ticket To Ride, Drive My Car, Taxman*) it was on a Casino. The Edge, of U2, likes a Casino, and also its more 335-alike (solid-centre) Sheraton. John Lee Hooker was a Sheraton player for much of his later career. Epiphone's Casinos and Sheratons are all essentially 335-style designs with some subtle variations.

Gary Clark Jr, the most-lauded young blues singer of 2013, prefers to play a genuine ES-335 or his own custom-finish Epi Casinos. "The Gibson ES-125 changed my world as far as introducing me to the hollowbody sound," says Clark. "And then from there, I had my eyeballs on Casinos until I finally got one. I just recently got two Blak and Blu Casinos which I'm so stuck on at the moment. Blak and Blu with a Bigsby! They're a dream."

The ES-347 of the 1980s added a coil-tap switch – creating the option of a Beatles-esque Casino-like tone. The recent ES-336 is a scaled-down version. With a body 13" wide and 16" long, it's easier on smaller frames but still looks like a classic ES-335. The same goes for the ES-390. There's also the 339 (and the posher 359). All differ a little, but if you find a 'regular' ES-335 unwieldy, have a look at these variations.

> "The ES-335 is beautiful, and I loved it. It never got old, it never wore down. It never lost anything"
>
> ERIC CLAPTON

Signature spin-offs abound. For a unique example, the Epiphone-branded Tom Delonge (Blink-182) ES-333 has just one pickup and one volume control – it seems under-specified and 'wrong', but it's been very popular. There was also a Gibson Custom 'Inspired By' ES-336 for Kiefer Sutherland. Yep, the actor. Maybe it was only in production for 24 hours?

But ultimately, there is no other semi-solid guitar design that has spawned such a long lineage as Gibson's ultimate Electro Spanish guitar, the ES-335. Eric Clapton may have sold his most famous one, but he still loves them. "The ES-335 is beautiful, and I loved it," says Clapton. "It was played regularly over the years. It got on albums, it never really changed. It never got old, it never wore down. It never lost anything. I'd play it now.

"Anything that's been that long in my life and is still functional – there aren't too many things that can command that kind of respect. There are no other tools in my life that have been as long-serving. After I sold the red ES-335, I immediately bought a sunburst one. It's a great guitar... and it's so loud. I'd forgotten how loud they were!"

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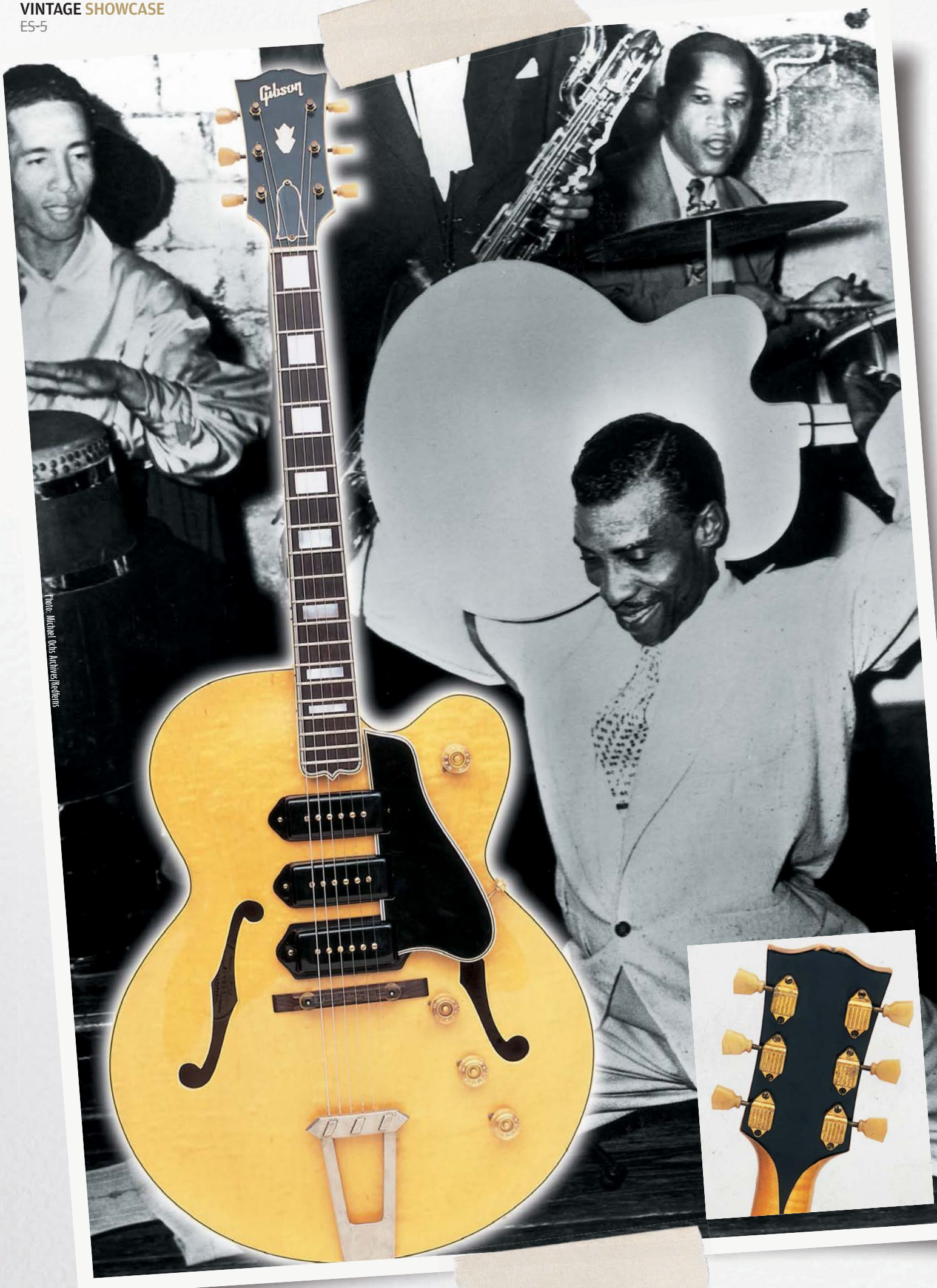


Photo: Michael Ochs Archives/Redferns

Vintage SHOWCASE

Gibson ES-5 1951

Big, blonde and beautiful, Gibson's knock-'em-dead ES-5 was the first three-pickup guitar the world had seen...

When it comes to having a real influence, you can forget about the electric blues revivalists of the 60s; popular they were, but they followed in the footsteps of a man who represents the fountainhead of the whole of modern electric lead guitar. Aaron Thibeaux 'T-Bone' Walker was born in 1910 in Linden, Texas. Invariably clad in a sharp suit and with his Gibson ES-5 held at virtually 90 degrees to his body, Walker played funky, good-time blues with immaculate style and taste. What's more, for the first time, here was a player whose entire approach relied upon the possibilities of the brand-new electrified archtop guitar.

Amplification let Walker play jazzy block chords that imitated the stabs of an entire horn section. It also freed him up to play pure single-note solos, paving the way for BB, Albert and Freddie King, and approximately a gazillion others. Jazz guitarists Charlie Christian, Eddie Lang and Lonnie Johnson had all pioneered horn-style electric guitar lines in the late 1930s: T-Bone Walker was right there too, even spending some time street busking alongside Charlie Christian. In 1940 T-Bone moved to Los Angeles, and there he combined these new moves with the elemental blues he'd learned at the feet of Blind Lemon Jefferson in Dallas in the 1920s, adding a jump blues swing with a clever knack of playing double-stopped 5/8 riffs that prefigure the intros to Chuck Berry's 1950s pop/blues hits. Generations of guitarists would take elements from his famous routine of splits, jumps and playing behind his head, yet T-Bone was also a great songwriter, bandleader and arranger, responsible for all-time classics such as *They Call It Stormy Monday*, *T-Bone Shuffle* and *West Side Baby*.

With his ES-5 held at 90 degrees to his body, T-Bone Walker played good-time blues with immaculate style

The great man recorded from 1929 through to 1970, and in the tunes produced during his golden period between 1942 and 1957 you can hear contemporary urban blues being created before your very ears.

Walker's guitar of choice, the luxurious Gibson ES-5, was yet another product of the fertile mind of Ted McCarty, the man who oversaw Gibson's golden electric period. With acres of fabulous laminated flamed maple and gold hardware, the ES-5 was a deliberate signal that Gibson wanted to dominate the post-war electric jazz market just as they had reigned over the acoustic archtop market throughout the 1930s. It came equipped with a startling array of not two but three P-90 pickups, all linked to a control system that offered individual volumes for each pickup, plus a master tone control.

This example – once the property of a certain Mr Gary Moore, no less – carries plastic-buttoned tuners instead of metal, which is unusual, but it's all-original save for replacement knobs. Wrap your hand around its gloriously chubby neck with its flatwound strings and L-5 style headstock, plug into something loud – preferably tweedy – and savour that golden, jazzy, charismatic plunk. Can you

CURRENT MODELS

- **ES-5 SWITCHMASTER**, Currently out of production, the most recent ES-5 model came from from Gibson Custom. It sported three Gibson '57 Classic humbuckers, three volume and three tone controls and a distinctive four-way pickup switch

TIMELINE GIBSON ES-5

1949
The 17"-wide, rounded cutaway, all-maple ES-5 makes its debut. Gibson included all their top-line trimmings, including multiple bindings, bound f-holes (though a few early examples came with unbound ones), pearl block fingerboard markers, a pearl 'crown' headstock inlay and gold hardware. Three P-90 pickups were connected to three volumes and a master tone control

1955
After six years in production, the ES-5 is offered with the new Tune-O-Matic adjustable bridge and Alnico V single-coil pickups – though most still come with P-90s

Late 1955
The factory adds slightly fancier five-ply top and back binding and fits the ES-5 with extra controls – a separate volume and tone for each pickup, making a total of six, plus a vertical four-position sliding pickup selector on the upper treble bout, and renames it the ES-5 Switchmaster

1956
The Switchmaster gains a new tubular tailpiece

1957
The single coils are dumped in favour of three humbucking PAF pickups

1960
The rounded cutaway changes to a pointed type

1962
The ES-5 is discontinued, but an ES-5 Switchmaster version remained available until recently from the Gibson Custom Shop

Gibson
Gibson

Vintage SHOWCASE

Gibson ES-175D 1956 & 1965

One of Gibson's longest-serving models, the faithful ES-175 is still as popular as ever. We doff a cap to a real trouper...

The brainchild of Ted McCarty, the man who would later instigate the Les Paul, the thinline ES-335 family and many more, Gibson's ES-175 was aimed squarely at the working jazz and danceband player – and by the 50s, most working pros had certainly woken up to the fact that the electric guitar was here to stay.

Gibson's new mid-priced jazz guitar hit the stores just four years after the war. The early and mid-40s had been a difficult time for the company: metal shortages had had a terrible effect on output, and at one point they'd even been forced into turning out children's toys. With hostilities finally over, they could ill afford to launch a poor-selling guitar, so McCarty wisely decided to spread Gibson's bets right across the price range in the all-important electric archtop market.

Bottom of the heap, pricewise, was the humble yet effective ES-125: deep-bodied and with no cutaway at this point, but with a strong single P-90 pickup mounted by the neck... ample for getting the message across. Those with real money at their disposal could order an ES-5, a striking extension of the super-luxury L-5 theme loaded with an impressive array of three pickups, or if they already owned a nice Gibson acoustic archtop guitar and didn't want to part with it, they could buy a special McCarty-instigated pickup-loaded replacement scratchplate.

It fell to the new ES-175 of 1949 to fill the all-important middle ground. As acoustic volume had now taken a back seat, the company was free to build guitars with tops constructed not of solid spruce but of tough laminated maple; the ES-5 was also laminated maple, but Gibson made sure this pricy model came with some figuring in the wood. The ES-175 had the same 16 1/4"-wide body shape as the post-1946 ES-125, but with plenty of extra body binding and a sharp, modern-looking cutaway. It had a 'crown' pearl headstock inlay, a handsome tailpiece with pointed ends and three raised parallelograms, and a fingerboard with matching double parallelogram inlays; borrowed from the Southern Jumbo flat-top, launched in the early 40s, these would later show up on the ES-345 thinline semi-solid, too.

The purposeful ES-175 became an instant jazz classic – a position it has held for over 60 years

Sturdy and purposeful, the ES-175 was an instant working jazz classic – a position it has held for over 60 years. The blonde example, far left, dates from September 1956, three years after the twin-pickup ES-175D was launched, and the last year for the single-coil P-90s. Blonde was an added-cost option on Gibson guitars, and today any blonde 50s Gibson, from the flagship Super 400 down to the humble ES-330T, commands a significant amount more cash than a standard sunburst model. Gibson made just 242 blonde ES-175s that year, and this comparative rarity makes them highly desirable showpieces.

The sunburst model dates from late 1965, by which time Gibson was building a lot more guitars. It's a fine player, with a slimmer neck and a classic warm tone, thanks to its two humbuckers: Gibson knew full well the importance of keeping the specs of this strong-selling model up to date. It also has the T-shaped tailpiece with the wavy sidebars that was introduced in 1958 and phased out in the early 1970s. For Gibson, the ES-175 was a hugely important instrument, and it's one of the best-loved – and most widely recorded – jazz guitars of all time.

OTHER MODELS

- **ES-175CC 1978-79**, with single 'Charlie Christian' pickup
- **ES-175T 1977-79**, thinline model just 1 7/8" deep, with two humbuckers – available in red, natural or sunburst

CURRENT MODELS

- **GIBSON MEMPHIS ES-175**, Curly laminated Maple top, back, and rim, '57 Classic humbucker pickups
- **GIBSON MEMPHIS 1959 ES-175D**, new for 2015 with standard maple top and two PAF-style humbuckers. Also, still a few VOS figured maple top models to be snapped up from a 2014 limited run

TIMELINE GIBSON ES-175

1949
ES-175 with single P-90 introduced. 16.25"-wide laminated maple body in sunburst or natural, double parallelogram inlays, trapeze tailpiece with three raised parallelograms, crown headstock inlay. A few models in the early 1950s came with Alnico V pickups

1953
ES-175D with twin P-90s launched. Same spec as above, plus two more knobs and a three-way selector. Again, some rare ones with Alnico Vs

1957
Humbuckers replace P-90s on both single- and double-pickup models

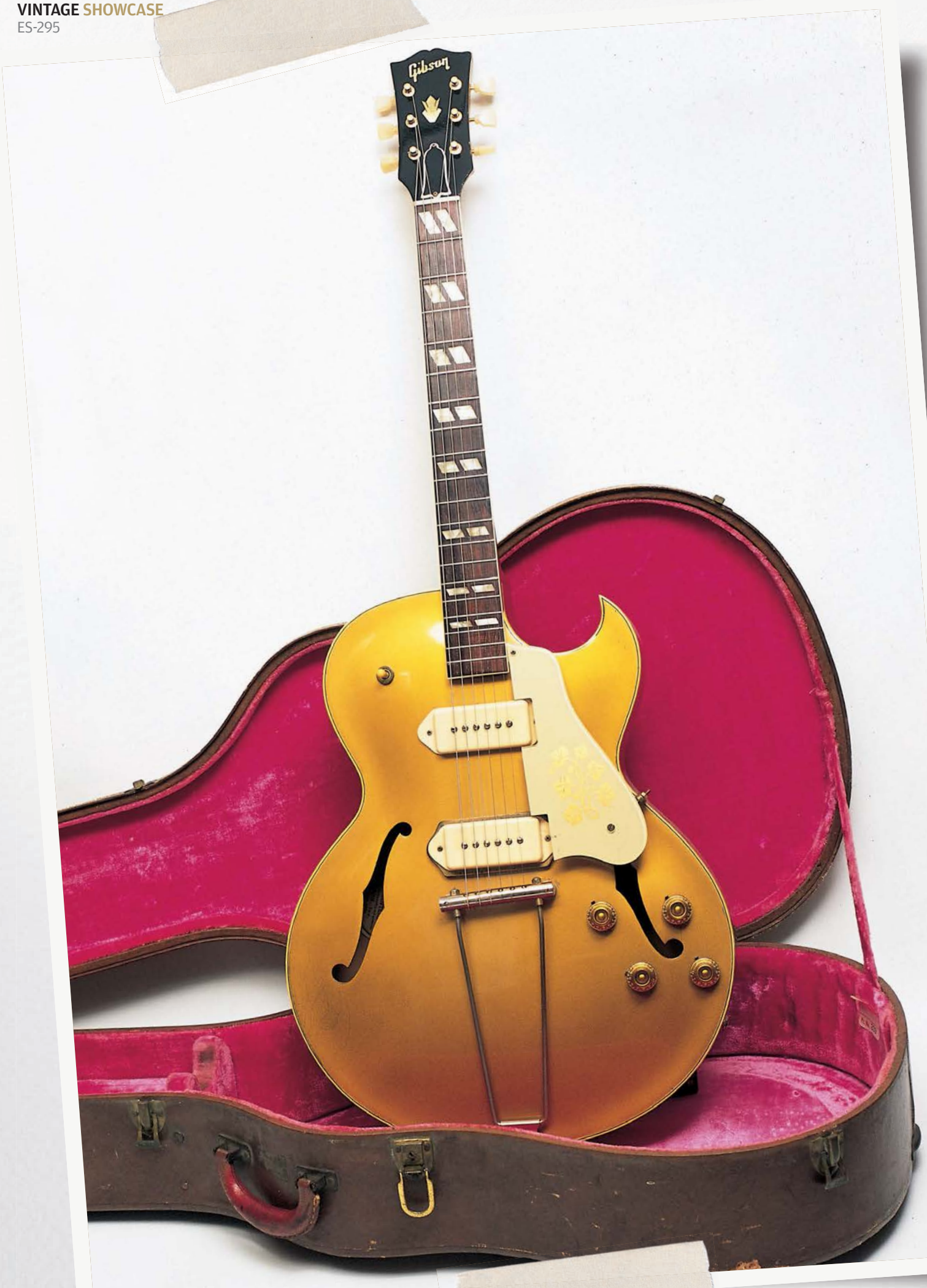
1958
New T-shaped tailpiece introduced with zig-zag shaped tubes on each side

1977
Wooden bridge is swapped for a Tune-O-Matic bridge

1983
Back and sides changed from maple to laminated mahogany

1990
...and from mahogany it changes back to laminated maple once again

1991
Renamed ES-175 Reissue, part of Historic Collection


Gibson

Vintage SHOWCASE

Gibson ES-295 1952

Gibson's resplendent ES-295 provides a fast track to rockabilly heaven. **RICK BATEY** salutes the guitar with the Midas touch...

To any kid bunking off school to go guitar-spotting, the sight of Gibson's outrageous ES-295 can be one of those events that engenders dangerous, indelible dreams of rock 'n' roll stardom. This showstopper wasn't the first gold-coloured guitar – that honour probably goes to bluesman Tampa Red's long-lost gold-plated National tricone – but when it appeared in 1952 it was one of the first gold electric guitars, the other being the legendary Les Paul Model.

The story goes that it was a one-off presentation guitar built by Gibson for a hospitalised musician in 1951 that first inspired the ES-295. Steve Howe, Yes guitarist and ES-295 fan, once saw a photo of the occasion and recalls that Mr Les Paul was pictured handing over an all-gold prototype featuring just one pickup and an L-5 neck, which implies block markers and a flowerpot headstock inlay – but by the time the ES-295 came officially onstream in 1952 it had morphed into a kind of luxurious version of the ES-175D. Though it shared the 175's laminated maple 16 1/4" wide body and double parallelogram fingerboard markers, the guitar came dressed up to the nines with cream plastic covers for the twin P-90 pickups, a floral-motif cream pickguard and a 'Les Paul'-engraved trapeze bridge/tailpiece. On the original-issue Les Paul this item didn't function properly, as the solidbody's shallow neck angle meant that the strings had to run under, not over, the bridge. On the fully archtop ES-295, however, it worked just fine, although the straight bar bridge did mean some intonation compromises had to be made.

This six-stringed Cadillac gained an extra fret in 1955, but the model was discontinued almost immediately after receiving humbuckers in 1958. Why?

In the 80s, as with Gretsches, the price of the ES-295 boomed. These days, it's viewed more as a glammed-up jazzer

The reason was probably simply sales. Though Gibson shifted a respectable 297 ES-295s in 1952 and a positively spectacular 637 in 1953, the figures soon began to drop off: in 1958, it sold just 49. The basic ES-175, in contrast, averaged a steady 500-plus all the way through the 1950s. Nevertheless, the ES-295 was reissued in 1990, and various Historic Collection models and even a Scotty Moore version followed – but all have Bigsbys and a fine-tuning bridge.

This beautiful example comes from the very first year of production. It's in all-original condition – tailpiece, knobs, tuners, even the pink-lined case – and has survived the decades with its all-over gold finish in remarkably fine shape.

Surprising, as the metalflake lacquer, which has real bronze flakes in it, is subject more to temperature cracking than normal nitro lacquer. The finish also contains elements of arsenic, which is the reason worn areas tend to turn green.

In the 1980s, the ES-295 became extremely fashionable and, as with some Gretsches, prices boomed. These days it's viewed as a glammed-up mid-range Gibson jazzer and a perfect video guitar... but to any guitar-crazy youngsters with their noses pressed against a shop window, it still scores a perfect 10.

GOLD DIGGERS

Scotty Moore
Elvis's right-hand man owned an ES-295 from 1953 to mid-1955 and used it on the earliest Sun recordings. Later, he moved on to an L-5 and a Super 400

Carl Perkins
Rockabilly legend Perkins picked an ES-295 as well as a gold Les Paul. He also employed the same Ray Butts-built Echosonic amp as Scotty Moore

Danny Gatton
The country/jazz legend owned two ES-295s: a Bigsby-equipped '52 that was thought for a time to be Scotty Moore's Elvis-era guitar, and a later '56 model

Brian Setzer
Stray Cat Setzer has strayed away from Planet Gretsch with what he calls 'the ultimate rockabilly guitar'

Geordie
The Killing Joke guitarist used dropped-D tunings on his ES-295 to shattering effect

CURRENT MODELS

- **Gibson Memphis 1952 ES-295**
  Finish is 'Bullion Gold' gently aged for an authentic vintage look, period-correct Bale tailpiece and 'dog-ear' P-90s
- **Gibson Memphis ES-295 Scotty Moore**
  Limited run and probably all snapped up by now. Pretty much as above, but personally signed by Scotty himself

SLIMLINE TONIC

Forever associated with veteran bluesmen, the ES-335 is in fact a versatile classic, and arguably a better guitar than both its Les Paul brethren and Fender's all-conquering Stratocaster. We trace the 335's history

Although it's undoubtedly celebrated, there's a good case for arguing that Gibson's ES-335, the pioneering semi-solid guitar launched in 1958, is in fact seriously under-appreciated. Gibson's most famous electric, the Les Paul, was designed as a response to the Fender Telecaster, and featured serious flaws when it was first launched. Although the Les Paul is a fine guitar, even its firmest fans would balk at suggesting that it's as versatile an instrument as Fender's foremost electric, the Stratocaster. Instead, it's the ES-335, so long ignored in favour of the Les Paul, that has to be credited as Gibson's finest, most versatile instrument.

Although the Stratocaster has been used by a dazzlingly eclectic club of guitarists, from Buddy Holly to Jimi Hendrix, the ES-335 can boast just as diverse a clientele. It's been used for trebly, biting funk by everyone from the sadly-missed Johnny Guitar Watson (his was named Freddie) to Prince sideman Levi Seacer. Its benefits as a blues guitar are well known thanks to BB King and a host of imitators, while Larry Carlton is one of many jazz guitarists to use the instrument. Mick Taylor used an ES-335 on many of the Stones' finest recordings, while Eric Clapton, so long associated with the Les Paul, switched to an ES-335 early on in his career as a guitar hero, using it in the studio and at Cream's celebrated final concert at the Albert Hall. The world of the ES-335 (or rather, its deluxe version, the ES-355) also pervades that '90s classic, Suede's *Dog Man Star* album, while Noel Gallagher often favoured the Gibson's Epiphone cousins on the early Oasis albums.

The ES-335 makes the Fender Stratocaster look like an unromantic lump of wood - it features a bigger tone, less susceptibility to interference, and offers far better access to the top frets than fenders finest

Variations on a theme: a rare 335 Stereo prototype and ES-345s from '65, '67 and 1970

The early 'dot-neck' ES-335s are regarded as the most desirable. This is a 1959 model

TED McCARTY AND THE BIRTH OF THE ES-335

Embodying all of Gibson's jazz heritage, yet suited for use in the most modern of contexts, the ES-335 makes the Fender Stratocaster look like an unromantic lump of wood – it features a bigger tone, less susceptibility to interference, and offers far better access to the top frets than Fender's finest. It's arguably only been overshadowed by the Strat because the Strat, bolted together from a few simple chunks of wood, is easier and cheaper to mass produce. It's been eclipsed by the Les Paul for the opposite reason – the Les Paul was so unpopular by the end of the '50s that it was discontinued, and original examples are therefore rare and priceless, giving it an unrivalled mystique.

The ES-335 was always a cornerstone of Gibson's range, and has remained in production ever since Ted McCarty and a small group of Gibson workshop staff came up with the instrument back in the 1955. Quite fittingly, Ted McCarty, ex-president of the Gibson guitar company, regarded the ES-335 as one of his finest moments. Perhaps that's because the Les Paul was always associated with the guitarist who endorsed the instrument, and there's always been some doubt how much of the design originated with McCarty and the Gibson staff. The ES-335 was always undeniably McCarty's baby. "I still remember how the ES-335 came about," McCarty recalled in 1996. "We'd been talking about the Les Paul, and people liked that solid body sound, but one of the most common complaints was that the guitar was so heavy. I was sitting at my desk, going over that problem again and again then the idea came to me."

McCarty's idea was to construct a hollow body guitar with a solid central block, to which the neck was attached, which would also carry the pickups, bridge, and other hardware; otherwise the instrument would be essentially hollow. This idea bore certain similarities to the concept behind Les Paul's 'Log' which, as the name suggests, used a log-like central core with two 'wings' added to make the instrument look more conventional.

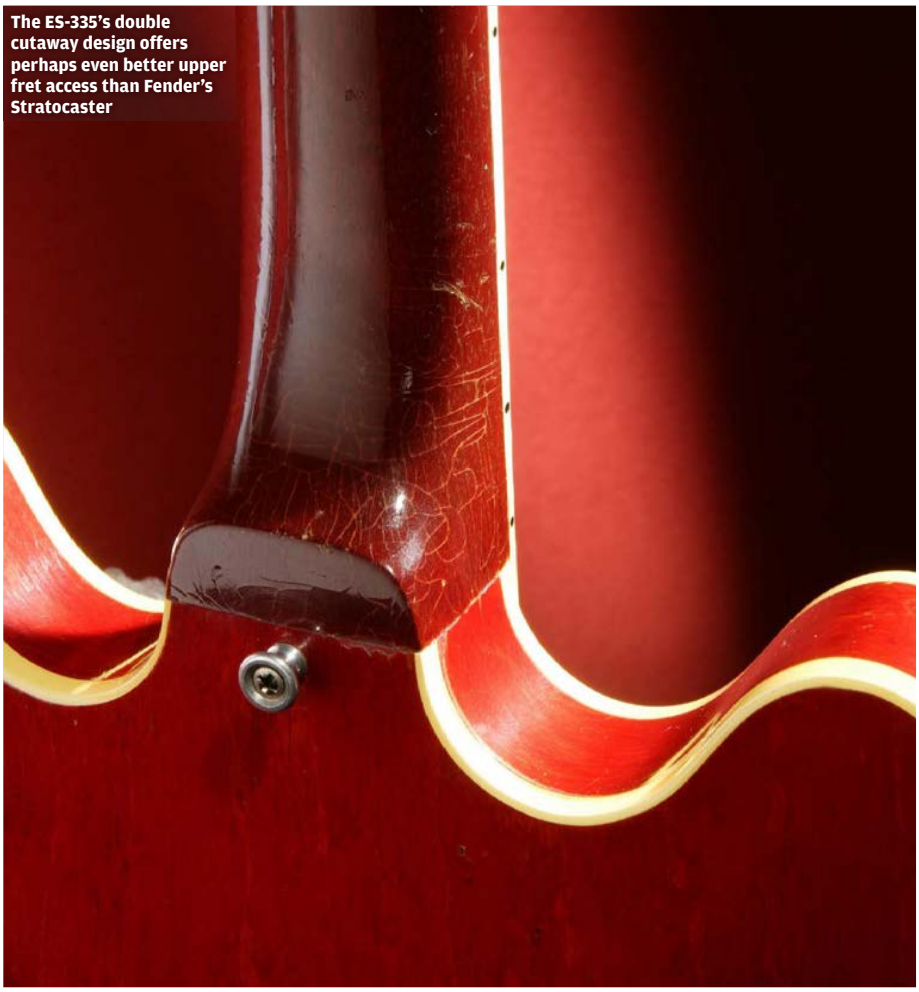
> "People liked the Les Paul solid body sound but one of the most common complaints was that it was so heavy, then the idea came to me"
>
> TED MCCARTY

McCarty's intention was that the new instrument would have a solidbody tonality; however, the eventual design was a blend of hollowbody and solid. The main structure was essentially a novel double-cutaway hollowbody built around the solid maple core; this contributed to a tone that could be warmer and more resonant than that of a solid body instrument. The actual shape of the body was a masterpiece of design, and quite unlike anything Gibson had produced before. Gibson had recently realised the virtues of the double cutaway guitar, perhaps thanks to the Fender Stratocaster, and the company was working on the double cutaway Les Paul Special around this time. McCarty: "Some players were starting to thumb the lower 6th string and, of course, they couldn't do it high up the neck - so we put another cutaway in."

McCarty cites the actual shape of the body as a group effort. "We wanted a double cutaway design, and we looked at various shapes. With a lot of those guitars, everyone in the workshop made a contribution." The ES-335 used two blunt cutaways, fully capitalising on the fact that with the central maple core there was no need for a bulky neck heel. Top fret access was therefore excellent. The shallow thinline design featured a pressed ply top and back - plywood, being less flexible than solid wood, also meant the guitar was less susceptible to feedback. The plywood top was attached to the maple core by means of spruce strips. As McCarty points out, "all the hardware - the bridge, tailpiece, pickups -

Pickups bridge and aother hardward are all attached to the 335's solid centre block

The ES-355 was top of the new line with smart appointments like stereo sound, an ebony fretboard with block inlays, a Bigsby and the Vari-tone circuitry for extra tonal options. This guitar heralds from 1960



The ES-335's double cutaway design offers perhaps even better upper fret access than Fender's Stratocaster

A 335 CHRONOLOGY

The ES-33STD Inspired various Gibson and Epiphone converts to the twin-cutaway, semi-solid thinline cause. These are the most obvious examples

1958-'82 E5-335TD
Pioneering construction allied to a then all-new body style. '50s examples are very highly prized, appreciably above those from the early '60s with later trapeze tailpiece types rating less again

1959-'82 E5-345TD
Stereo circuitry and Vari-tone rotary selector are less player-friendly features which promote a reduced price range.

1959-'82 E5-355TD
Deluxe variation of the ES-335, with bound ebony fingerboard and large pearl block position markers. Many with optional stereo circuitry and Vari-tone switch.

1964-'71 TRINI LOPEZ STANDARD
Oddball variant boasting Firebird-style headstock and diamond-shaped soundholes.

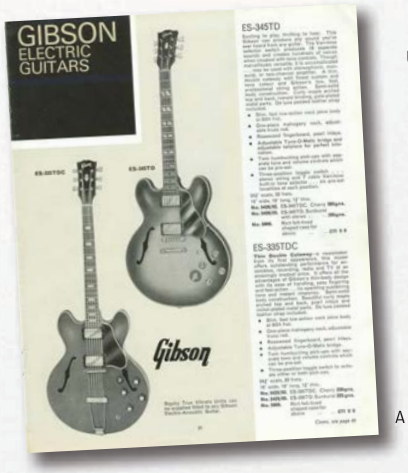
1965-'71 E5-335-12
Gibson's cash-in on the 12-string electric boom, with suitably longer headstock but very few other appropriate amendments.

1969-'74 E5-340TD
Master volume and mixer controls are the most obvious changes rung on the standard ES-335.

1971-'74 E5-320TD
Cheapo variation with slider switches and other controls on a Tele-type metal plate and Melody Maker single-coil pickups.

1972-'78 E5-325TD
Another Gibson exercise in cost-cutting, with controls located a semi-circular plastic plate, plain-top mini-humbuckers and a single f-hole.

1978-'90 E5-347TD
More messing with the norm and longer-lasting than most. Large block inlaid ebony fingerboard, coil switch located on the right horn and fine-tuner tailpiece.



1979 E5-335TD CRR
Small production Country Rock Regular model, with topless Dirty Fingers humbuckers, coil switch and brass nut as standard.

1979 E5-335TD CRS
Equally short-lived Country Rock Stereo version with appropriate circuitry, master volume, coil switch and fine-tuner tailpiece.

1979-'86 E5-ARTIST
A major re-work, with complex active electronics and no f-holes: features guaranteed to lose votes and value.

1979-'82 E5-335PRO
Work-horse model with Pro logo on truss-rod cover and Dirty Fingers humbuckers devoid of covers.

1980-date BB KING CUSTOM (BB KING LUCILLE from 1988)
Features include Vari-tone switch. stereo circuitry with twin jacks, fine-tuner tailpiece, goldplated hardware and no f-holes.

1980-'85 BB KING STANDARD
Similar to the above but with chromed metalwork.

1982 E5-369
Ultra-short production span mix-n'match model with coverless Dirty Fingers humbuckers, mini-toggle coil switch and fine-tuner tailpiece.

1982-date E5-335 DOT
Reissue based on the 1960 original.

1987-'91 E5-335 STUDIO
A somewhat spartan model, lacking f-holes and covers on the twin humbuckers.

1996 E5-336
A later variation on the theme, with smaller body and a revised headstock shape.

This 1964 ES-335 has the 'small block' inlaid. fretboard introduced in 1962, and a chunkier neck profile

were attached to the maple, so essentially you had a solid body guitar."

The ES-335 made good use of Seth Lover's new humbucking pickups, which were fitted to the Les Paul, and the Modernistic series including the Flying V, that same year. Other aspects of the hardware were similar to other current Gibsons: the Tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece, toggle switch for lead, rhythm, or both pickups, and the standard control layout of volume and tone for each pickup. As with the vast majority of other Gibson models of the same year, the 335's neck was made from mahogany with a rosewood fingerboard. The nominal 24.75" scale length, the back angled three-a-side headstock with crown inlay and the Kluson tuners were equally familiar features.

Whereas many guitar companies were attempting to sell their instruments using gimmick-laden ideas, Gibson's publicity material concentrated on the instrument's real, practical virtues; the fact that the thinline body made it comfortable to play, the lack of interference suffered by the humbucking pickups, the light weight, and the excellent access to the upper frets. The guitar's full name was the ES-335TD, standing for Electro Spanish Thinline Double (Pickup). Few other guitar companies, apart from Fender, concentrated on the genuine design USPs (unique selling points) of their instruments - perhaps for the first time since the advent of the Fender Telecaster, Gibson had out-done its

This recent reissue's specs would be right for a short period in 1960, with a 'long' pickguard and mirror-top knobs

rivals by coming up with an instrument that was more practical and reliable than any of its peers.

All of these virtues would ensure that the guitar sold in healthy quantities from its launch in 1958; the upmarket version, the ES-355, which featured an ebony fingerboard, bound headstock and Bigsby as standard (the Bigsby was an option on the 335), was also popular from its inception, as exemplified by the fact that BB King bought a sunburst ES-335 soon after its launch in 1958,

switching to the ES-355 on its introduction the following year. It was in 1958, of course, that Fender attempted to launch a more versatile jazz-orientated guitar in the shape of the Jazzmaster. Gibson's ES-335 would prove to be the more enduring classic.

SETTING THE TRENDS

It was a mark of Gibson's confidence in the new guitar, and the status of initial orders, that so many derivatives followed its launch in the middle of 1958. The E5-355 arrived late that year, with the ES-355 TD5V Stereo Vari-tone version following in 1959. The E5-345, with its double parallelogram inlays, rosewood fingerboard and Vari-tone circuitry as standard, also arrived in 1959. The budget ES-330, also introduced in 1959, lacked the central block, and with the neck joint placed comparatively clumsily at the 16th, rather than the 19th fret, mimicked its predecessor more in looks than in concept. Epiphone versions followed soon; 1959's Sheraton featured a Frequensator tailpiece and New York pickups, soon replaced by mini-humbuckers, and multiple binding; the Riviera of 1962 featured simpler single binding. The Casino was generally similar to the ES-330.

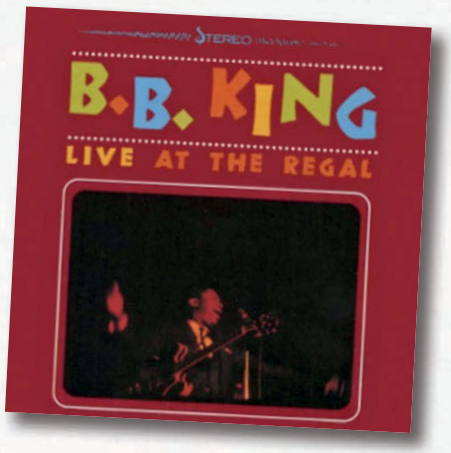
Derivatives of the ES-335 were not, of course, confined to the Gibson company. Gretsch and Guild were just two American rivals who proceeded to mimic Gibson's trend-setting semi-solid; Gretsch changed all their hollow body range to double cutaway versions in the early 1960s, while Guild's Starfire range copied the ES-335's cosmetics even more closely. Practically every major guitar maker would soon produce its 335 derivative, but perhaps the most significant tribute to the guitar came from main rivals Fender, whose Starcaster of 1976 was an

> Such was the success of the guitar, by the early 1960s practically every major guitar maker would produce a 335 derivative

The ES-345 sat in the middle of the line featuring stereo sound and the Vari-tone control but otherwise sticking close to 335 specs. Can be easily identified by its Parallelogram inlays

335 RPM: THE BEST OF GIBSON SEMIS ON RECORD

BB King
Live At The Regal
The 1964 show that galvanized a generation of pale but keen young Brits. Worth investing in the *Ladies & Gentlemen... Mr BB King* box set too.



Chuck Berry
The best Of...
Inventor of rock 'n' roll, archetypal 335 strutter and simultaneously best and worst guitarist of all time.

Freddie King
Best Of Freddie King
Les Paul/335 speed-freak without whom Green, Clapton, Taylor' and Page would have been well stuck

Nell Clark
(Lloyd Cole & the Commotions)
Rattlesnakes
Much underrated lead'n'rhythm pop player. Tip top 335 work splashed all over Lloyd Cole's debut LP.

Otis Rush *Tops*
Live '85 set on flipped over 1965 E8-355 from Chicago great

Mick Taylor (Rolling Stones)
Exile On Main Street
Here squashed between keef and (it's rumoured) Ry Cooder but pretty darn soaring all the same,

Fred Frith *Guitar Solos*
Heroically jammed a pickup in his 345's nut and then played Both sides of a capo stuck at the 12th fret

Eric Clapton
From The Cradle
From a period when he shifted back to the thicker humbucker sound in search of of blooze authenticity

John Scofield
Still Warm
Kickin' outing from bunch of ex-Miles Davis hard nuts. Ultimate 335 jazz rock

Larry Carlton
Southern Comfort
'Mr 335', Crusader guitarist and all-round jazz-rock session king. See also Steely Dan's Aja and Joni Mitchell's Hejira

Alvin Lee
(Ten Years After)
The Best Of Ten Years After
Decent collection containing much blazing fretwork on progressively sticker-festooned 335.

Emily Kemler
East To Wes
Top tribute to Wes Montgomery recorded two years before her tragic death aged 34

Lee Ritenour
Collection
Captain Fingers typifies the clean West Coast 335 jazz sound

Elvin Bishop
(The Butterfiled Blues Band)
East West
ES-345 joust with Mike Bloomfield on this much name-checked '66 outing from the Paul Butterfield Blues Band

Bernard Butler (Suede)
Dog Man Star
'Difficult' second Suede album, ie. Butler's last, from the prince of multi-tracked Bigsby-woggled cherry red overload.

And don't forget to check
Johnny 'Guitar' Watson ,
Larry Coryell (fusion soloist),
Robbie Krieger (The Doors),
Sterling Morrison
(Velvet Underground).
Alan Murphy (various sessions),
Bill Nelson (Be Bop Deluxe),
Jimmy Rogers (Muddy Waters band),
Eric Stewart (10cc),
T-Bone Walker (later period) and
Ritchie Blackmore (the first three Deep Purple albums).

From 1964 the 335 was offered with a trapeze tailpiece although this 69 version has a factory fitted Bigsby. Also note the change of horn shaping and Gibson logo'd pickups

obvious attempt to copy both the concept and the cosmetics of the 335.

As with other Gibsons, the ES-335 changed throughout the model's lifetime. The early versions were available in Natural or Sunburst finish, both with dot markers. The cherry finish option followed in 1959, while the pickguard changed to a shorter version in 1961, with fret markers changing to blocks in mid-1962. In 1964 Gibson replaced the stop tailpiece with a trapeze version, marking the end of the classic models (many trapeze tailpiece examples have had a stud tailpiece fitted later).

Values of early examples vary mostly according to rarity; thus an early, natural dot marker guitar can fetch up to £40,000, although a cherry guitar from the next year of production might fetch half that sum. By the arrival of block markers, typical prices drop even more, to around £12,000 for a 1963 example in sunburst or cherry. In general, the top-line ES-355s fetch less than their 335 equivalent, and thus a 1959 mono example would fetch around £16,000. A block marker ES-345s with stud tailpieces can change hands for less than £10,000, the more modest prices a consequence of the sheer popularity of this range. Even later trapeze tailpiece examples of this guitar tend to be excellently crafted instruments, and at around the £3000 mark compare well with any modern guitar. Compared to the high prices still commanded by vintage Les Pauls a 335 or one of it's siblings still look decent value, the ES-335 not only lays claim to the role of Gibson's most enduring classic, many consider it one of the best value vintage guitars on the market, too.

Artist: Liam Cromby - **We Are The Ocean**

Photo courtesy of: Ben Gibson Photography

SPANIARD IN THE WORKS

Sophisticated looks but the heart of a rock and blues animal: the ES-335 is that rarest of guitars, a compromise without any drawbacks. **PHIL HARRIS** opens his thinline cupboard

PHIL HARRIS

This industry legend has been a guitar fanatic since childhood, quickly acquiring a Les Paul obsession that has never left him. During his long professional playing career, he provided lead guitar for the likes of Edgar Broughton (as well as, briefly, Thin Lizzy), before starting a guitar hire company specialising in vintage gear. A long-time consultant for the likes of Sotheby's and Christie's, Phil's encyclopedic knowledge of classic gear (most of which he's played and/or owned at some point) is beyond compare.

The ES-335 is the most popular Electric Spanish guitar Gibson ever made. Essentially, the ES-335 is a stop-off between an ES-300 semi-acoustic and a Gibson Les Paul and SG Standard. When Eric Clapton played the Cream finale gigs at the Royal Albert Hall, he played an ES-335 through three 100W Marshall amps and six 4x12" cabs for a good reason: if he'd played through any other ES guitar – or any fully-hollow semi-acoustic – he'd have started *Sunshine Of Your Love* with a guitar in his hands and ended it with the neck in one hand and the tailpiece in the other... the rest of it would have been in little pieces, distributed evenly among the crowd.

The ES-335 has earned its place in the big four electric guitar models, along with the Strat, Les Paul and Tele

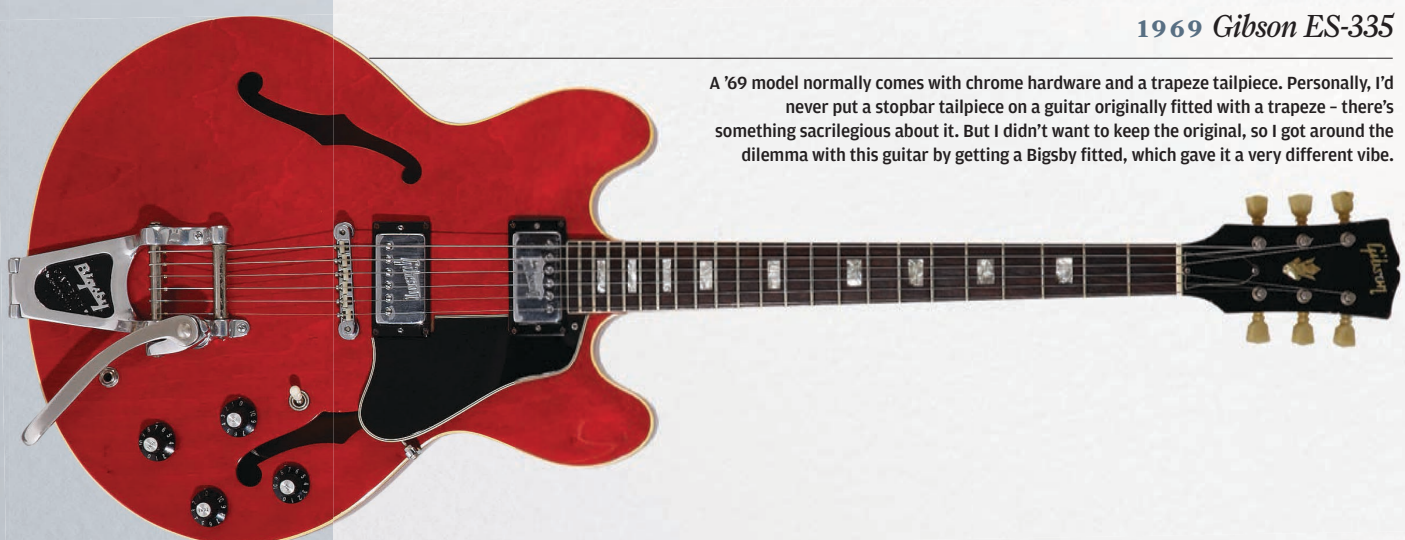
The effect the ES-335 has had on popular music since its birth in the late 50s means that, along with the Stratocaster, Les Paul and Telecaster, it's rightfully earned its place in the big four roll of honour of electric guitar models. The ES-335 was constantly evolving in its early years. The 1958 prototypes had really clubby necks and very thick binding. The later ones that year displayed thinner binding, but kept the chunky neck and the original neck angle, which was very straight to the body, so that the bridge sat fairly flush. ES-335s in 1959 had a slimmer, more refined neck, although it was still pretty chunky. The neck angle was also moved back slightly, which raised the bridge. By 1960, the neck was slimmed down even further and the pickguard was shortened; by '61 Gibson had taken away the clear-topped knobs and replaced them with dish knobs. In late '61 the dot markers were replaced with block markers, so in actual fact a late '60 ES-335 dot marker and a late '61 block marker model are for all sense and purposes the same guitar.

And of course the tinkering continued, with the neck changing every year. It changed for the worse in 1964 as the necks became just too slim at the nut and tapered at the back. By 1966, we began to see the first of the bad models, with horrible necks, trapeze tailpieces and chrome not nickel hardware. To my mind, ES-335s made between 1966 and 1982 aren't, shall we say, exactly premium quality.

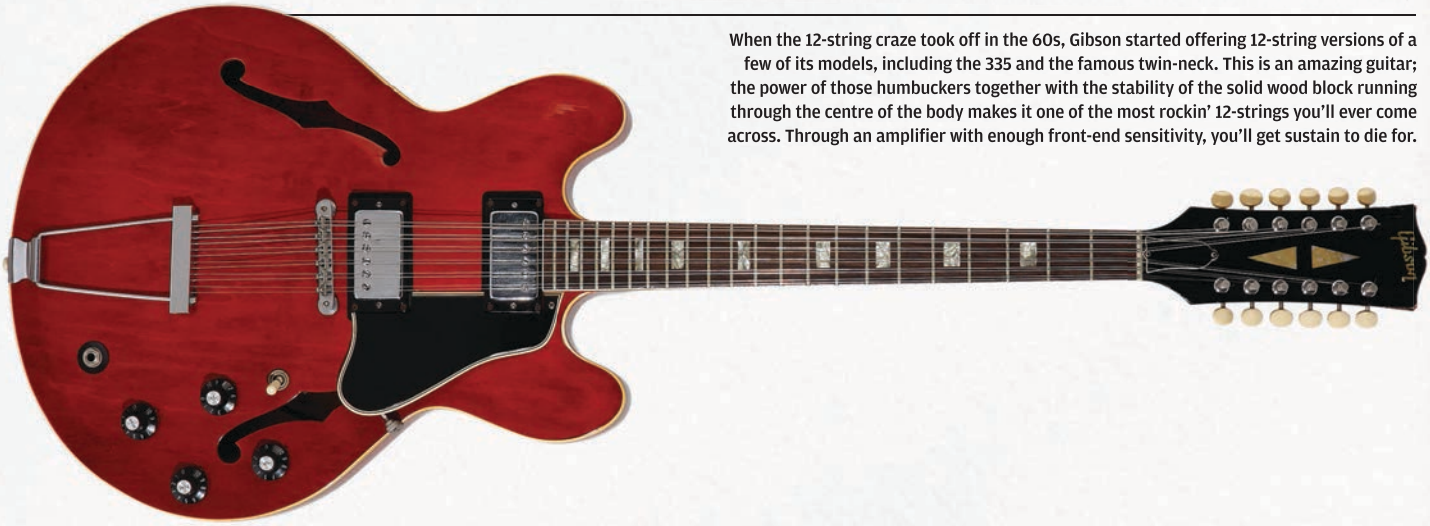
In 1982, Gibson went back to its heritage, and the reissues its made since then are mighty fine guitars. If you ever get the opportunity to get a clean vintage ES-335 that's in great condition and has all the original parts (a lot of pickups and hardware were taken off old guitars to put on Les Pauls back in the 70s), you really should snap it up. However, a modern reissue will also give you the vibe that made 335s so highly prized in the first place.

1969 *Gibson ES-335*

A '69 model normally comes with chrome hardware and a trapeze tailpiece. Personally, I'd never put a stopbar tailpiece on a guitar originally fitted with a trapeze – there's something sacrilegious about it. But I didn't want to keep the original, so I got around the dilemma with this guitar by getting a Bigsby fitted, which gave it a very different vibe.

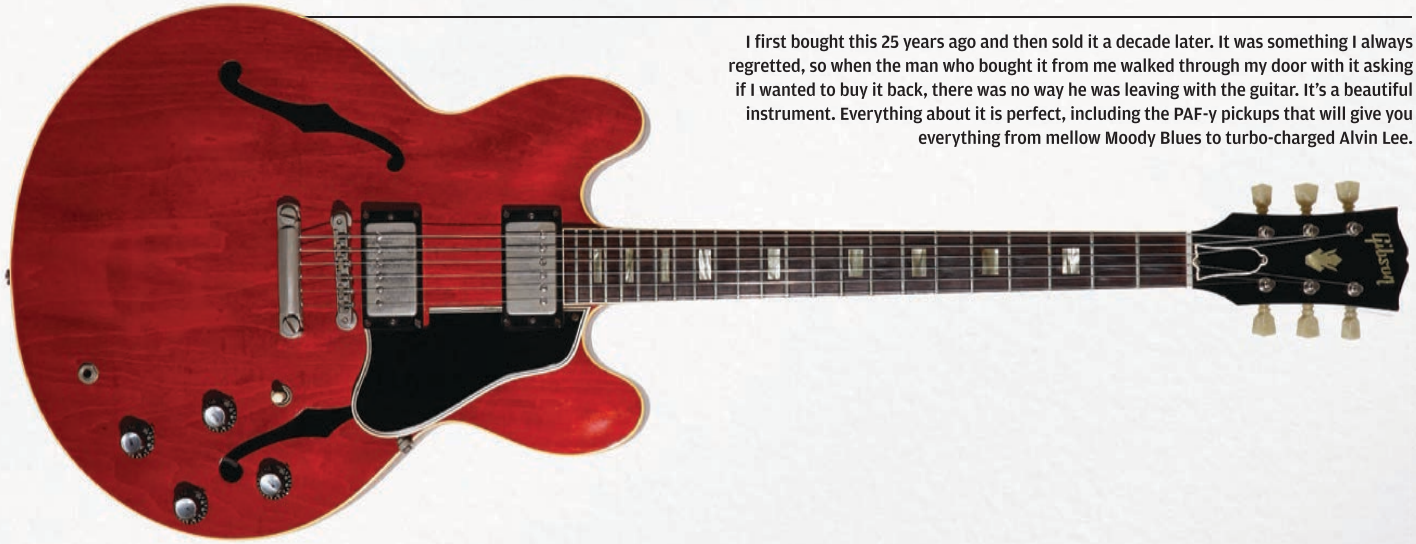


1966 *Gibson ES-335 12-string*



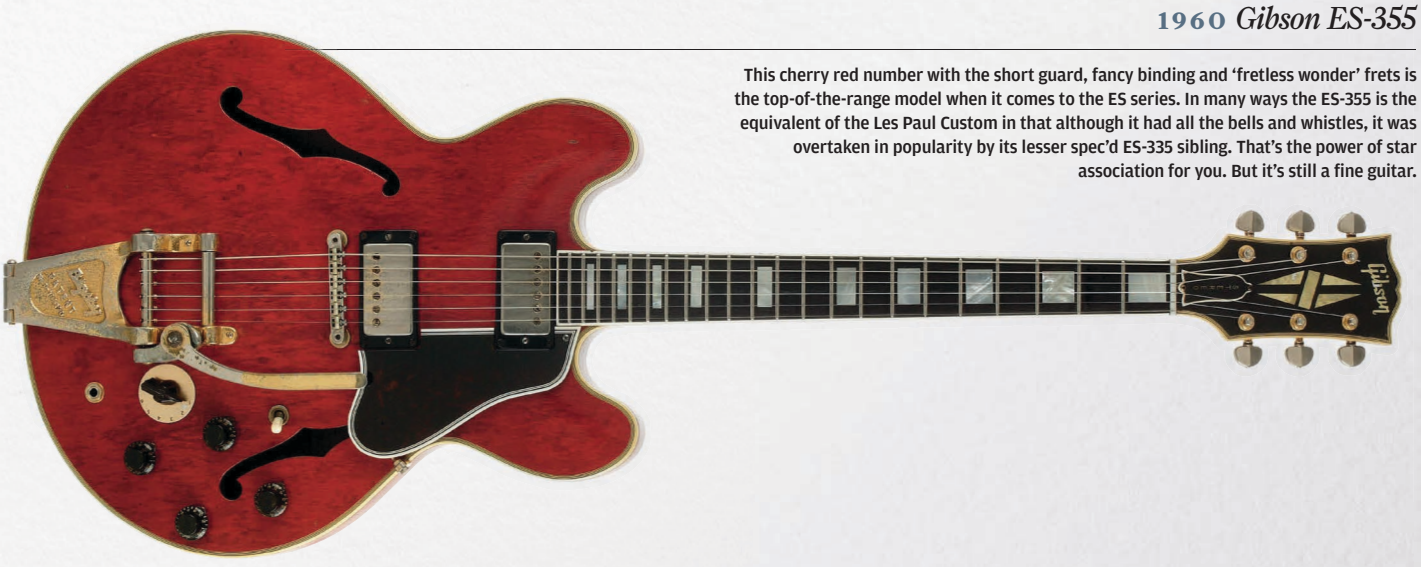
When the 12-string craze took off in the 60s, Gibson started offering 12-string versions of a few of its models, including the 335 and the famous twin-neck. This is an amazing guitar; the power of those humbuckers together with the stability of the solid wood block running through the centre of the body makes it one of the most rockin' 12-strings you'll ever come across. Through an amplifier with enough front-end sensitivity, you'll get sustain to die for.

1963 *Gibson ES-335*



I first bought this 25 years ago and then sold it a decade later. It was something I always regretted, so when the man who bought it from me walked through my door with it asking if I wanted to buy it back, there was no way he was leaving with the guitar. It's a beautiful instrument. Everything about it is perfect, including the PAF-y pickups that will give you everything from mellow Moody Blues to turbo-charged Alvin Lee.

1960 *Gibson ES-355*



This cherry red number with the short guard, fancy binding and 'fretless wonder' frets is the top-of-the-range model when it comes to the ES series. In many ways the ES-355 is the equivalent of the Les Paul Custom in that although it had all the bells and whistles, it was overtaken in popularity by its lesser spec'd ES-335 sibling. That's the power of star association for you. But it's still a fine guitar.

Vintage BENCH TEST

1959 GIBSON ES-335TD

We take the opportunity to run the rule over an authentic '59 ES-335 to see if its vintage mojo still holds sway over today's models

This 1959 ES-335 is hardly mint, although it's still a beautiful looking instrument and it retains that kind of 'comfortably used' condition, without appearing overly worn. Overall, the difference in feel between this and most new ES-335s is dramatic. Most notably, the '59 feels extremely lightweight by comparison. The sunburst nitro-cellulose finish is a definite three-tone brown/red/deep amber, and still looks really vibrant, even though it's well cracked, worn and probably faded. Certainly, the finish has yellowed: it's very noticeable over the single bound edges, where the binding has taken on a nicotine stain colouring. On the rear of the '59's neck, the sunburst does stop quite abruptly, but the spray is more graduated and, importantly, the neck colour is a rich, deep brown.

The difference in feel between this guitar and a new 335 is dramatic and the shaping of the neck is superb

While newer 335s generally aim to replicate the rounded pre-'62 'Mickey Mouse' horns, this model's horns are slightly longer with a more turned-in tip. In terms of materials, little seems to have changed; the body (around 44mm thick at the rim) is made from a four-ply maple laminate, the top and back are joined to the sides in classic acoustic making fashion, with kerfed mahogany linings. The centre block is maple, and by removing the bridge PAF pickup you can clearly see the spruce fillets used to shape the centre block's arching to match it to that of the top and back.

The shaping of the one-piece mahogany neck is superb. In the lower positions, there's a slight V shape which feels fairly slim to the hand; in actuality, this is quite a sturdy and robust neck that fills out by the 12th fret to a more conventional balanced C section. Wear and tear can of course take its toll. The rosewood fingerboard – presumably Brazilian – has adopted a dark lustre and clearly has been worked on and refretted. Unfortunately, the original binding has been removed and re-used and, typically, has shrunk, leaving a gap at both ends of the neck. Sadly, the fret wire stops short of the binding, reducing the available playing width.

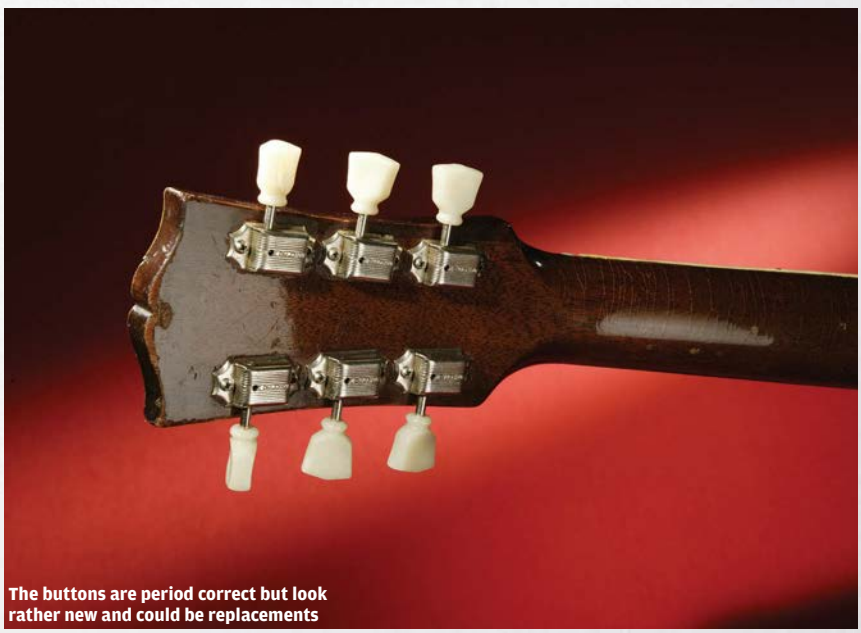
The Kluson Deluxe tuners have the correct-for-the-period single ring-type 'tulip' or 'keystone'-shaped, light mint-coloured buttons and display single 'Kluson Deluxe' logos on their rear nickel plated casings, but they look rather new and are probably replacements. The ABR-1 bridge and stop tailpiece, though, are beautifully worn nickel plate – you can't beat that for looks! Going beyond the tailpiece, two tell-tale filled holes indicate this instrument was once previously fitted with a Bigsby.

The '59 is fitted with two covered PAF pickups with 'Patent Applied For' black stickers on the rear: these pass to the three-position selector switch and onto the four controls – volume and tone for each pickup – with amber-coloured clear top bonnet knobs. Note the early-model indicating long five-ply pickguard, which extends down to the tune-o-matic bridge. The 335's sound is best described as 'broad', it really does offer a wide tonal range, from the surprisingly spiky edge of the bridge humbucker to the warm and woody neck pickup tone with that beautiful twin-pickup bell-like jangle In the middle. We'd say that the 59 sounds noticeably more resonant than a new model and slightly more acoustic-like. The >

KEY FEATURES

1959 Gibson ES-335TD

- **DESCRIPTION** A vintage instrument circa 1959, serial number A32275
- **BUILD** semi-solid
- **HARDWARE** Original PAF humbuckers
- **SCALE LENGTH** 626mm (24.75")
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.9mm at nut, 51.8mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.3mm at first fret, 23.2mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 50mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** (approx.) 7.5lbs



The buttons are period correct but look rather new and could be replacements

bridge PAF can – depending on your amp – sound sharper than you'd probably expect from a 'vintage' instrument.

Compared to a newer version, though, there's more midrange, giving a smoother and fuller tone – especially noticeable at higher volume levels. The two PAFs are very well balanced output-wise, resulting in a nicely natural graduation between the two pickup extremes, not the large volume leap of the new model – admittedly a matter of personal taste. Note, however, that the resonant character of the lightweight '59 does make it more prone to feedback. We weren't able to A/B this old 335 against an equivalent '59 Les Paul – we wish! – but even a comparison with a '57 Les Paul Jr (obviously bridge pickup only) was interesting. The solidbody Junior sounded much firmer and gutsier in the midrange. The '59 may lack the midrange and power of the Junior, but make full use of the controls and the 335's tone range repeatedly surprises. One thing is for sure, if you're after a broader scope of sound, a 335 – new or old – could well be the answer.

Top left. **The 335's headstock has survived the years collecting only a few dings, while the fingerboard appears to be Brazilian rosewood and looks to have been refretted**
Top right. **The sunburst on the rear does stop quite abruptly, while the back of the neck is a deep, rich brown**
Right. **Pickup covers, ABR-1 bridge and stop-tailpice show off some beautifully worn nickel**

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GIBSON
Bigsby

Vintage BENCH TEST

GIBSON ES-335 1969 vs 2004

What's the answer for money-wise seekers of a great Gibson ES-335: a '59 reissue or a model from the underrated late 1960s? **RICK BATEY** finds out

The Gibson 335 is the Jaguar XK120 of the guitar world. Sleek but aristocratic, you can take it into any situation and look like a million dollars. It was dreamed up by Gibson as a way of enticing traditionally-minded players of the late 1950s into embracing the possibilities of the electric age – and how well it did it.

The ultimate collectable 335 is a blonde one from as early as possible. They're one of the absolute classics, and if you want one you're looking at around £50,000. Luckily Gibson has a long-running reissue, the 335 Dot, so we decided to perform a head-to-head between a Dot and a 335 from a 'lesser' vintage year – a cool cherry red '69, a guitar which you could buy today for £3,500-£4,000.

This '69 is a tasty example. With its cherry finish still bright and the binding displaying that hard-to-replicate creamy shade that comes with age, it's got the 'pointy eared' double cutaways that arrived around 1962, but the original-size f-holes (they became slightly enlarged late in 1969). Our Dot, a nicely-used example about six years old, displays more figuring on its laminated maple body; the pinkish binding colour is completely different to the '69's, but it has 50s-style 'Mickey Mouse' ears. Weight-wise, the Dot is almost five ounces heavier, despite the older guitar's aftermarket Bigsby.

The Dot's fingerboard, naturally, has the 'dot' markers that give the model its nickname. The neck binding is a clumpy 1.8mm wide, the '69's a far more delicate 0.9mm. The '69 has the post-'62 small 'block' markers, and the fingerboard is Indian rosewood; to get a fabled Brazilian board on a 335, you'll have to buy one from 1966 or earlier.

Neck width is a common complaint concerning mid- to late-60s Gibsons. This one comes from the tail-end of the infamous skinny years, generally held to be between '65 and '68, and it measures an extremely narrow (yet fast and comfortable) 39.5mm, or 1 9/16", at the nut; in '69 Gibson began to increase the nut width a little. The neck is slender, too, but it thickens up to a fairly beefy 25mm by the 12th fret. The Dot has Gibson's '60s slim taper' profile. Wider in the hand than the '69 but fairly flat-backed, it's authentic to '59 specs at 1 11/16"/42.5mm and stays much more parallel in depth, increasing only from 20.5mm to 22mm over the first octave. It's a pleasant but not particularly speedy handful.

The 335 was dreamed up by Gibson as a way of enticing players into embracing the electric age – and how well it did it

The Dot has the 'desirable' 17-degree peghead angle; the '69's back-angle is a mere 14 degrees. The '69's 'crown' headstock inlay is a dead ringer for one from 10 years earlier, though; the reissue inlay is crude and incorrectly shaped, and its tuners are nickel kidney-button Grovers. The '69 wins with its lightweight keystone Klusons.

Our Dot comes supplied with '57 Classic pickups, a nickle ABR bridge and stoptail, a 'short' guard (without the '69's lovely thicker lower cream layer... such a subtle feature on older Gibsons) and passable amber knobs. The '69 has its correct black witch-hat skirt knobs, 'Gibson'-embossed pickups (an unpopular feature from 1972 period; these may well have been changed), a Tune-O-Matic with nylon, not metal saddles, and a factory-original Bigsby with a tension bar to ensure proper >

Left. **The narrow nut makes this '69 less desirable**
Right. **The Dot has a '59-width nut but it's not as fast**

KEY FEATURES

1969 ES-335TDC

- **PRICE DESCRIPTION:** Semi-solidbody electric. Made in USA
- **PRICE:** £3,500-£4,000
- **BUILD:** Laminated, bound maple body with maple centre block. Bound mahogany neck with block inlay Indian rosewood fingerboard
- **HARDWARE:** Bigsby vibrato, Tune-O-Matic bridge with nylon saddles. Keystone-buttoned Kluson tuners. Twin Gibson-embossed humbuckers, two volumes, two tones, three-way selector switch
- **LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes
- **FINISHES:** Sunburst, cherry, walnut
- **SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH:** 39.5mm at nut, 48.2mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK:** 20.5mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING:** 35mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT:** 3.68kg/8.1lbs

KEY FEATURES

2004 ES-335 Dot

- **DESCRIPTION**: Semi-solidbody electric. Made in USA
- **PRICE:** around £2,599
- **BUILD:** Laminated, bound maple body with maple centre block. Bound mahogany neck with dot inlay Indian rosewood fingerboard
- **HARDWARE:** Stop tailpiece, Tune-O-Matic bridge with saddle retaining clip, nickel Grover tuners. Twin '57 Classic humbuckers, two volumes, two tones, three-way switch
- **LEFT-HANDERS:** Yes
- **FINISHES:** Tobacco sunburst, natural
- **SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH:** 43mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK:** 20.5mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING:** 36mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT:** 3.81kg/8.4lbs
- **CONTACT**: Gibson www.gibson.com

Left. **The '69 has an aftermarket Bigsby fitted**
Right. **The Dot was issued with the classic stoptail**

break angle at the bridge. Some hate Bigsbys; we love them, and it's so good to see a '60s 335 that hasn't had its Bigsby or original trapeze tailpiece removed in favour of a stoptail. Hurrah!

Sounds

The modern 335 Dot is a strong and loud performer, no doubt. Though bassy and rich, it's got a notably crisp neck pickup, a poppy middle position and a snarling bridge humbucker, which is prepared to show its teeth at the slightest opportunity.

Plug in the cherry red '69 and you're instantly met with far more subtlety – a lower output, more woodiness, more openness, and a tonal spread between the pickups that's considerably less overt, with the mild articulation of the neck pickup moving to a sweet, focused twin-pickup setting and then a bridge pickup sound that's chimey and nutty rather than gritty and tough.

The '69 gives you the chance to get into the vintage game for a good deal less than you might imagine

The '69's sound must be down largely to the difference in pickups, but let's not discount the ameliorating, warming, slightly dampening effect of those nylon saddles – not a feature that would normally attract Gibson tone-freaks, you might think... but what about all those classic plastic-saddle Epi Casino sounds recorded by the Beatles, among zillions of others?

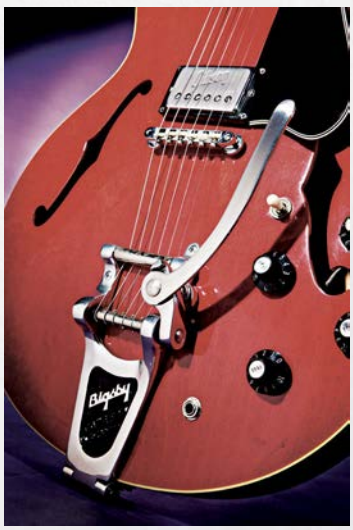
There's also more shimmer and detail – and some of that, quite possibly, is down to the extra undamped string length ringing away sympathetically between bridge and Bigsby. Plus, surely any guitar that's had good chordal vibrations running through it for 42 years is going to sound different to a box-fresh example that still has to be taught that it's a guitar instead of some pieces of wood... and this one certainly knows what it is.

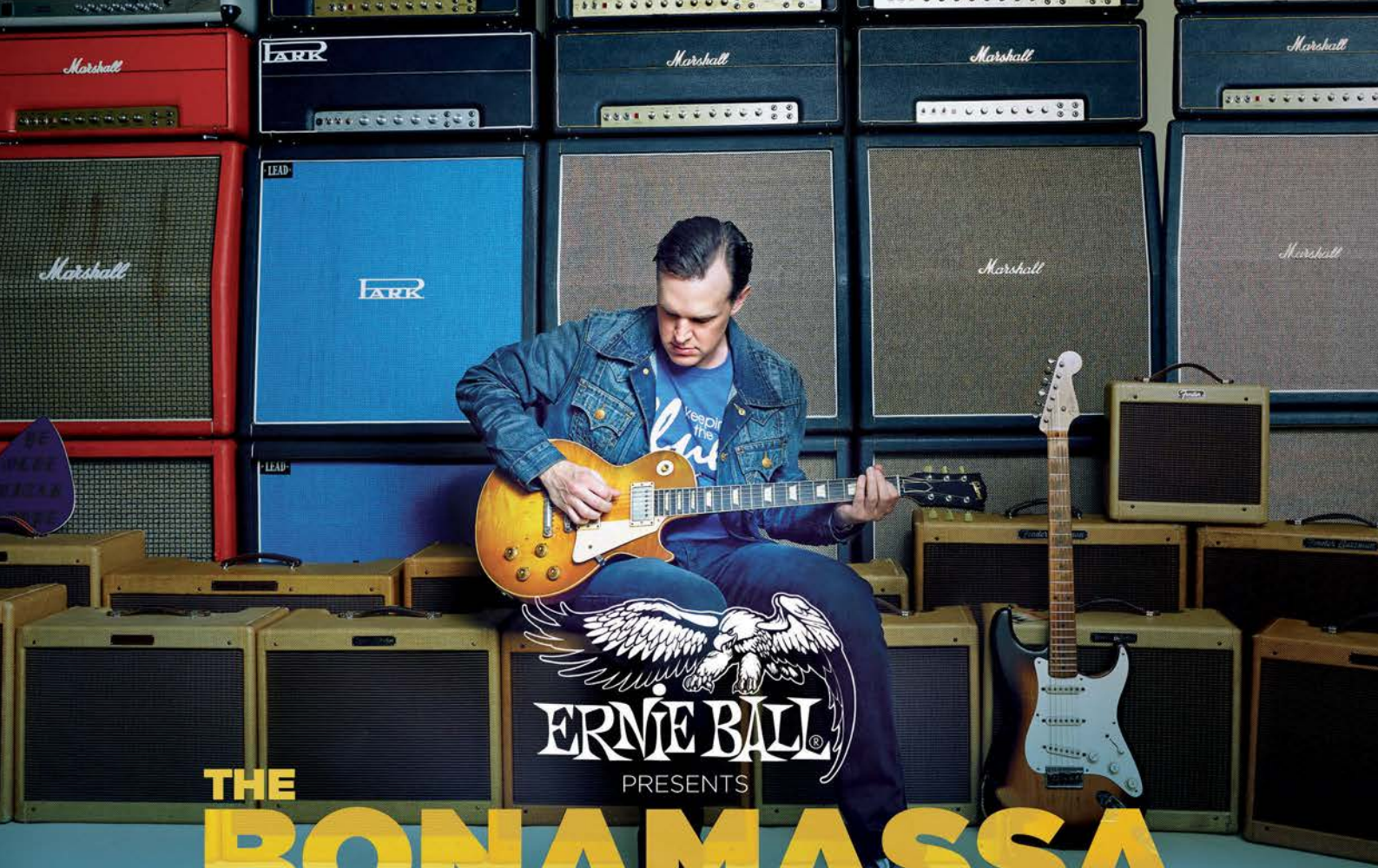
Verdict

Reissue or original? For stage use, there are many worse choices than a recent 335 Dot. It'll sound very fine, it'll stay in tune and it'll cover jazz, blues and rock as only a 335 can. But sometimes you can get a much older example for not all that much more, especially if you cannily sacrifice elements of one or more factors – especially the precise age, originality, or the overall condition.

This '69 is completely original and it's in solid 8.5/10 condition, but being 10 years younger than a holy grail dot-neck '59 it gives you the chance to get into the vintage game for a good deal less than some might imagine. If you don't mind a neck width more akin to that of a Fender Telecaster than a Gibson thinline from the hugely expensive golden years, then you just might have found yourself a winner.

This is the art of the player who loves vintage guitars rather than the vintage guitar collector – spotting gaps and common features in the market to discover a great instrument that, sometimes for fairly minor reasons, fetches much less than a mint condition primo example. Character, atmosphere, inspiration, maturity... or just an old guitar? Maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to give yourself the chance to find out.





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SEMI ALTERNATIVES

Though the classic ES-335 gets the lion's share of attention, says **PHIL HARRIS**, there are plenty of other great Gibson semi-acoustics.

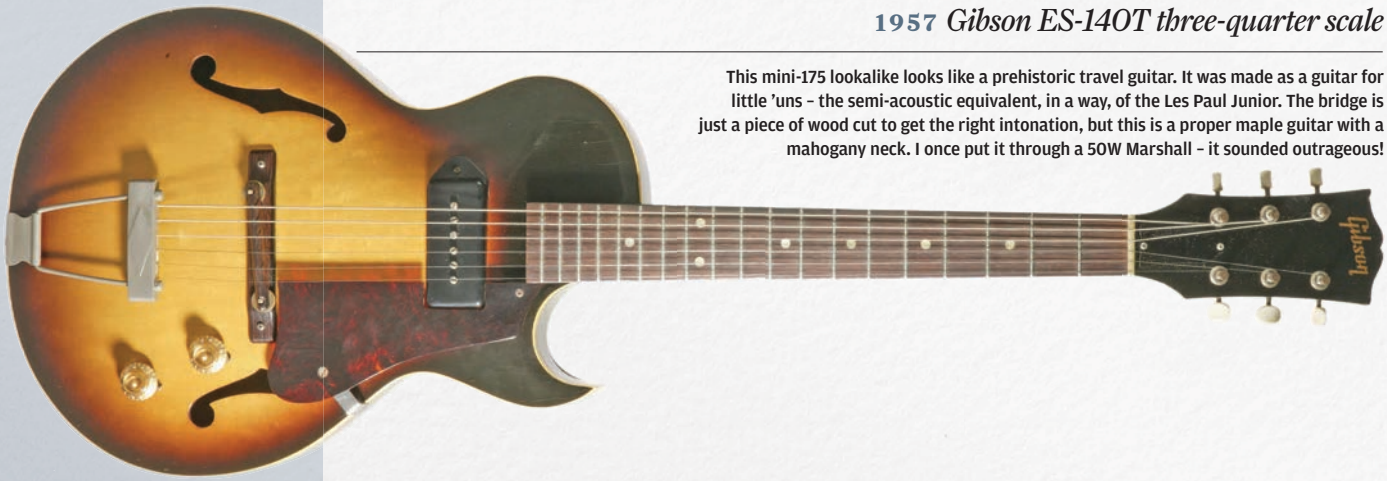
PHIL HARRIS

This industry legend has been a guitar fanatic since childhood, quickly acquiring a Les Paul obsession that has never left him. During his long professional playing career, he provided lead guitar for the likes of Edgar Broughton (as well as, briefly, Thin Lizzy), before starting a guitar hire company specialising in vintage gear. A long-time consultant for the likes of Sotheby's and Christie's, Phil's encyclopedic knowledge of classic gear (most of which he's played and/or owned at some point) is beyond compare.

In terms of the greatest all-time electric guitars, the Gibson ES-335 is rightly seen as one of the big four, along with the Gibson Les Paul and Fender's Stratocaster and Telecaster. It's funny that the 335 – the model at the bottom of the initial trio of thinline guitars – gets the most press, but that doesn't mean that the other two should be ignored. Back in the early '60s you never saw the top of the range ES-355 over in the UK, but there was a regular supply of the others, and it was the ES-345, the one with the Varitone rotary switch, that bands such as The Searchers and The Hollies – not to mention George Harrison when he wanted to try out a Gibson – really wanted. The guitar player in my brother Mo's first pro band, Margarine (I agree – awful name) had an ES-345, and he used to get these great out-of-phase sounds. He's still got that guitar, and I'm still trying to get him to sell it to me.

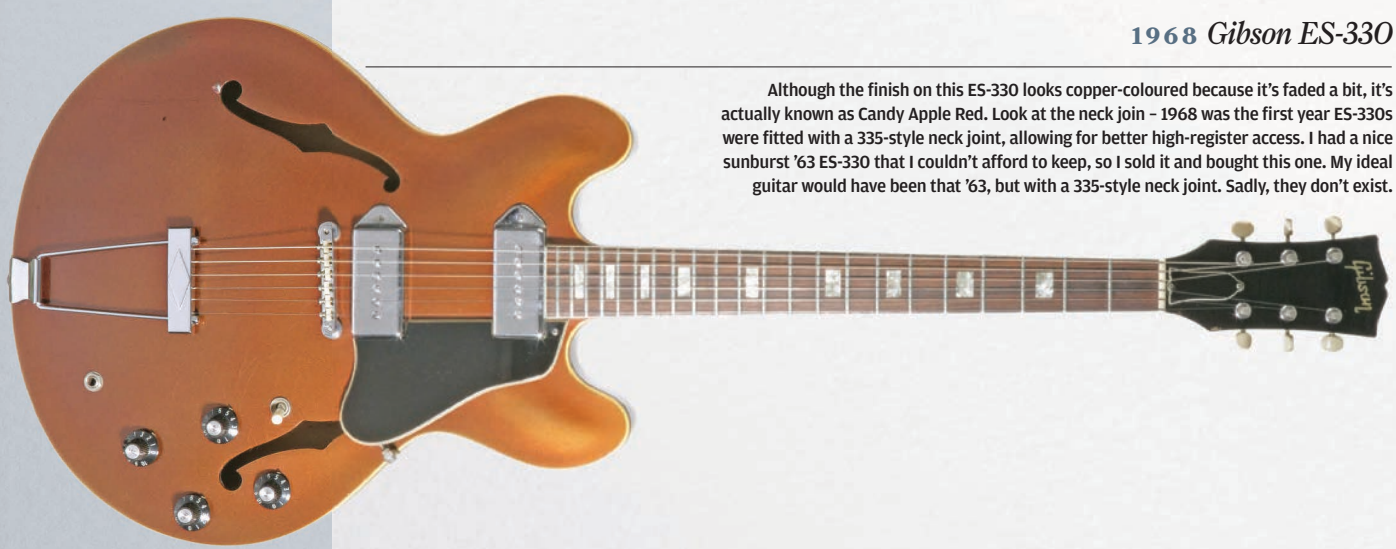
If you couldn't afford an ES-345 in the 60s, only then would you settle for an ES-335. And if you didn't have the wherewithal for an ES-335, there was always the ES-330. Many went down that route, making the ES-330 the most-sold ES guitar in the early 60s; everyone wanted that body shape and Gibson on the headstock. No one was playing in the high registers back then, so it didn't matter that the neck joined the body a lot earlier. There are plenty of 'not 335' Gibson Electric Spanish bargains to be had out there, including the thicker-bodied models – so here's a taste of the great guitars to be found.

1957 *Gibson ES-140T three-quarter scale*



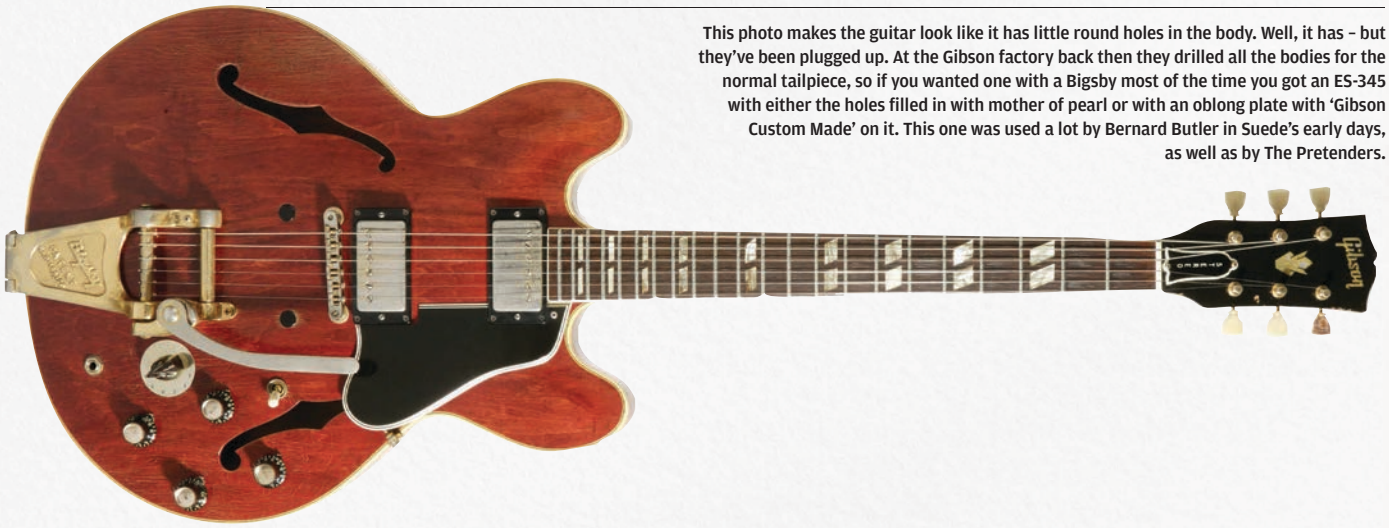
This mini-175 lookalike looks like a prehistoric travel guitar. It was made as a guitar for little 'uns – the semi-acoustic equivalent, in a way, of the Les Paul Junior. The bridge is just a piece of wood cut to get the right intonation, but this is a proper maple guitar with a mahogany neck. I once put it through a 50W Marshall – it sounded outrageous!

1968 *Gibson ES-330*



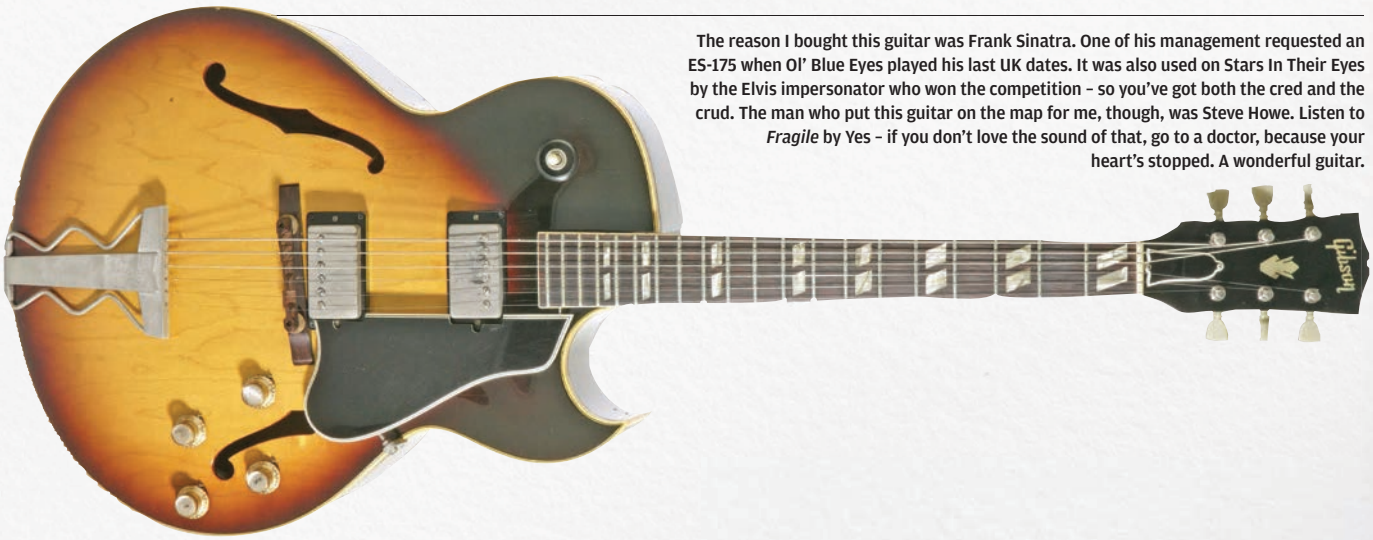
Although the finish on this ES-330 looks copper-coloured because it's faded a bit, it's actually known as Candy Apple Red. Look at the neck join – 1968 was the first year ES-330s were fitted with a 335-style neck joint, allowing for better high-register access. I had a nice sunburst '63 ES-330 that I couldn't afford to keep, so I sold it and bought this one. My ideal guitar would have been that '63, but with a 335-style neck joint. Sadly, they don't exist.

1961 *Gibson ES-345*



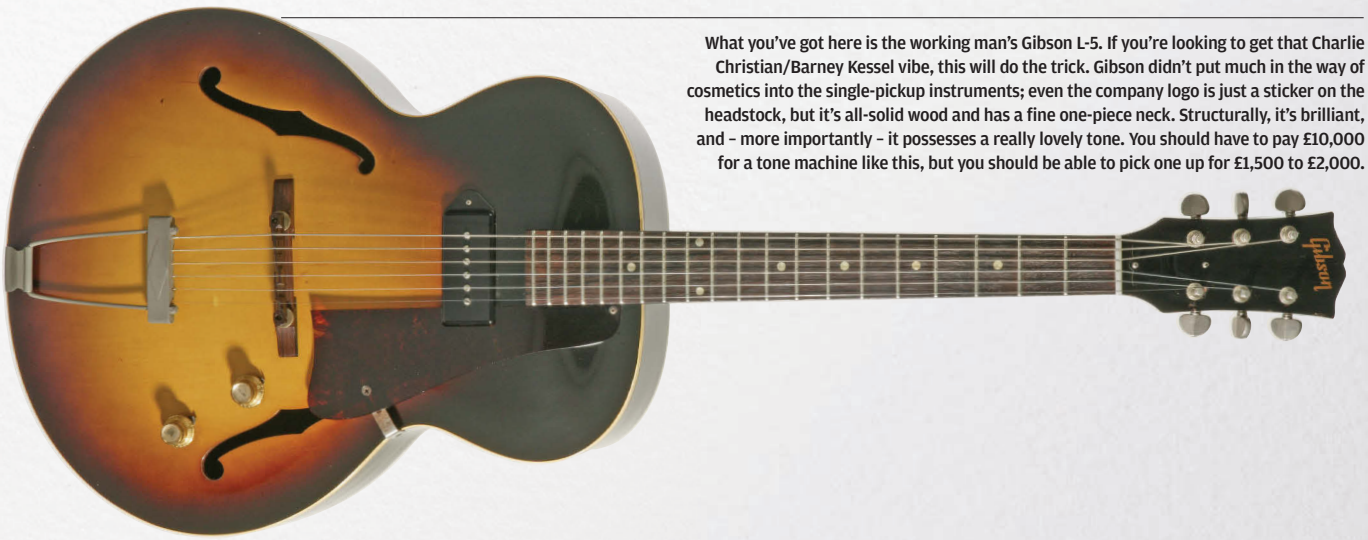
This photo makes the guitar look like it has little round holes in the body. Well, it has – but they've been plugged up. At the Gibson factory back then they drilled all the bodies for the normal tailpiece, so if you wanted one with a Bigsby most of the time you got an ES-345 with either the holes filled in with mother of pearl or with an oblong plate with 'Gibson Custom Made' on it. This one was used a lot by Bernard Butler in Suede's early days, as well as by The Pretenders.

1963 *Gibson ES-175*



The reason I bought this guitar was Frank Sinatra. One of his management requested an ES-175 when Ol' Blue Eyes played his last UK dates. It was also used on Stars In Their Eyes by the Elvis impersonator who won the competition – so you've got both the cred and the crud. The man who put this guitar on the map for me, though, was Steve Howe. Listen to *Fragile* by Yes – if you don't love the sound of that, go to a doctor, because your heart's stopped. A wonderful guitar.

1957 *Gibson ES-125*



What you've got here is the working man's Gibson L-5. If you're looking to get that Charlie Christian/Barney Kessel vibe, this will do the trick. Gibson didn't put much in the way of cosmetics into the single-pickup instruments; even the company logo is just a sticker on the headstock, but it's all-solid wood and has a fine one-piece neck. Structurally, it's brilliant, and – more importantly – it possesses a really lovely tone. You should have to pay £10,000 for a tone machine like this, but you should be able to pick one up for £1,500 to £2,000.

Gibson
CUSTOM
Gibson

Vintage SHOWCASE

Gibson ES-350T 1962

It might look like a pure jazzer, but a user list including Chuck Berry, Danny Gatton and Eric Clapton implies there's more to the ES-350 than augmented chords alone...

The ES-350 has endured a convoluted history – in fact, the name has been applied to three quite different guitars made by Gibson. The first incarnation, born in 1947, was the company's first electric model with a cutaway (a feature highlighted with the model suffix 'P' for 'Premier', later amended to 'C' for 'Cutaway'). Essentially, it was a full-depth ES-300 with extra neck access. For the first year or two the guitar came armed with one P-90 pickup; then it gained two, and was fitted with two volume knobs plus a master tone knob on the lower bout.

After a few more adjustments in the controls and hardware departments, the original ES-350 bit the dust in 1955 to be replaced by the ES-350T. A very different design, this one had a slim body like the expensive Byrdland or the cheaper ES-225, plus the Byrdland's short 23.5" scale and rounded cutaway. The two P-90s were swapped for humbuckers in 1957.

Before the invention of his trademark ES-355, Chuck Berry was a huge fan of this version of the ES-350, and he surely appreciated its easy-playing neck and rich appointments, such as gold-plated hardware and flashy-looking split-parallelogram fingerboard inlays. The third and final gasp of the ES-350 came in the dark Norlin-owned days of 1977, when Gibson slapped the name on a medium-thin, rounded cutaway, twin-humbucker jazzer with – unusually – a long 25.5" scale. Though a nice guitar, considering the Big G's quality control hassles of the time, this last version was given the chop in 1981.

These mid-period ES-350s provide a whole lot of guitar for the money if you fancy a short scale

Our two catwalk models on the left – one in standard sunburst, the other in the rarer and more desirable blonde – originate from the second era of the 'Mk 2' ES-350T. By late 1960, Gibson had begun to replace many of the rounded cutaways on its expensive archtop guitars with the supposedly more modern sharp 'Florentine' type (it's not a look that collectors particularly appreciate, though Ted Nugent – the only rocker we can think of who dared to brandish an ES-350 – doesn't seem to mind). The blonde example's desirable finish is offset by the presence of an added Bigsby, but otherwise it's all there, from the correct tuners down to the gold-plated pickup covers and transparent gold knobs. Guitar-part trainspotters will enjoy the fact that it's got plastic bridge saddles, like those found on an Epiphone Casino – a feature introduced slightly haphazardly from around late 1961.

Our sunburst example also dates from 1962, and this one has the correct tubular-decorated tailpiece. Why does it have 'Custom' on the truss-rod cover? We've no idea. Notice that, again, the saddles are plastic, but this time the knobs are 'mirror tops', a type that became widespread across much of the Gibson range from the 1960s onwards.

These mid-period ES-350s provide a whole lot of guitar for the money if you fancy a short scale combined with great humbuckers and assured Gibson quality. And the pure vintage whiff when you open the case... well, it's enough to put anyone in the mood to pick some sweet chord-melody jazz standards. Or, if you prefer, just have a joyful blast through Johnny B. Goode.

ES350 PLAYERS

- **Chuck Berry** Handsome man was early fan
- **Danny Gatton** Telecaster man goes jazz
- **Eric Clapton** Bought in tribute to Berry
- **Keith Richards** Loves using one in the studio
- **Honeyboy Edwards** Bluesman's prize guitar

CURRENT MODELS

None

TIMELINE GIBSON ES-350

1947
Introduced with full-depth, rounded cutaway f-hole archtop with pointy-ended triple raised parallelogram tailpiece, three knobs and one P-90 (four knobs, a toggle switch and two pickups arrived after 1948). Tune-O-Matic bridge added in 1956, the last year of production

1956
ES-350 Mk II (ES-350T) launched. New thinline rounded cutaway body, a short scale neck and a level of trim placing in between the ES-225 and the Byrdland. New tubular tailpiece, two P-90s, four knobs, pickup selector switch. This is the 'Chuck Berry' model, a rare and sought-after guitar: it took Eric Clapton years to find one at a decent price

1957
P-90s replaced by humbuckers

1960
New pointed 'Florentine' cutaway design. Model discontinued in 1963

1977
ES-350T Mk III arrives, going back to the future with a rounded cutaway and a medium-thin 2 1/4" deep body, two humbuckers and a long Fender-style 25.5" scale

1981
Model discontinued once again

1992
ES-350T Mk IV. Early 1990s Limited edition model released in the Mk III long-scale format. Sadly no longer in production

Trini Lopez
Few entertainers have ever captured worldwide popularity as completely and as rapidly as Trini Lopez. He is just as much at home in the Olympia Music Hall in Paris as he is at P. J.'s in Hollywood. His Reprise records and albums are international hits, including his latest "The Folk Album."
As a singer, Trini is exciting and magnetic—always in absolute command of his audience. As a musician, his style is simple, direct, and without gimmicks. His guitar is a Gibson, and it always has been.
It all began twelve years ago, when, as an aspiring performer in Dallas, Texas, Trini knew he needed a professional instrument—a guitar that could sparkle or speak softly, depending on the mood—a guitar that was as sensitive and responsive as the artist himself. Naturally, then, he chose Gibson.
Now, skilled Gibson craftsmen and Gibson's electronic engineers have combined to create a Trini Lopez model guitar that is just as exciting as the young artist who inspired it. In the Thin Body Standard or the Full Body Deluxe, the Trini Lopez Model Gibson is a beautifully crafted, superbly sensitive instrument. Try one at your Gibson dealer and see why Gibson is the acknowledged world leader in guitars.
GUITARS AND AMPLIFIERS
Gibson
Gibson, the workingman's guitar.
ibson at work for Reprise Records.
TRINI LOPEZ

Vintage SHOWCASE

Gibson Trini Lopez 1968

Hola, amigos! One of Gibson's oddest yet grooviest models would never have happened without the input of a certain Latin lounge crooning sensation, 'Mr La Bamba' himself...

Was this guitar the result of Gibson's weirdest ever endorsement deal? Probably, yes. Nightclub crooner Trini Lopez was no guitar maestro and could never compete in the swift-fingering stakes with other Gibson six-string stars such as Johnny Smith or Tal Farlow.

Born in Dallas in 1937, Trinidad Lopez III cut his first record in 1955 (bravely refusing to change his Hispanic identity). When an invitation to join The Crickets right after Buddy Holly's death came to nothing, Lopez found himself alone and stony broke in Los Angeles. With no options left, he bagged some solo gigs. A year later, Lopez had a stratospherically big break – he was talent-spotted by Frank Sinatra – and after that the hits, the Vegas shows and the movies rolled in.

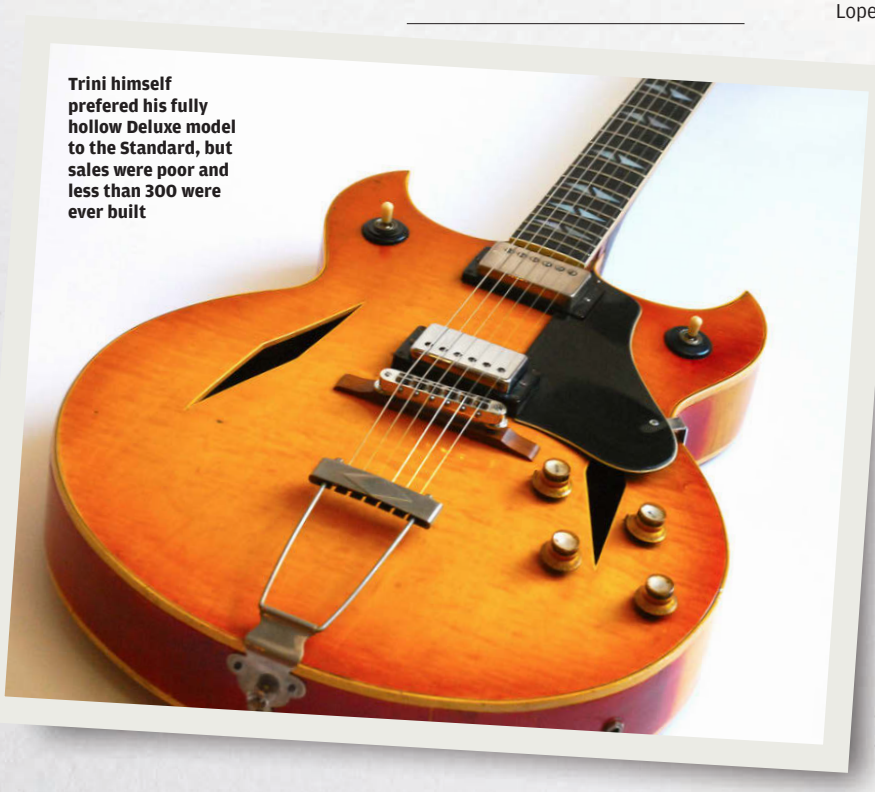
The main thing for Gibson was that Lopez was a huge MOR star and one of the few folkies to play electric guitar – even if he only thumbed simple open chords – so the company must have thought they'd made a good deal. Mind you, it's painfully obvious from looking at the two Lopez models that the artist was quite content with a spot of cosmetic tweaking rather than an all-new guitar.

The Trini Standard was a hit: nearly 800 were shipped in 1967 alone, making it Gibson's best-selling signature of the time

The Deluxe model – the one Mr Lopez invariably played – was a rejigged Barney Kessel, an ugly device like a double sharp-cutaway ES-175 with twin-triangle fingerboard markers, a single-sided headstock borrowed from a Firebird when it wasn't looking, and a wooden name plaque tacked onto the tailpiece. It did have one practical added feature: a standby switch on the upper horn, a first for Gibson. Less than 300 were ever built.

In contrast, the Trini Lopez Standard – a tasty rehash of the timeless 335 – is a far cooler. Like Lopez himself, the Standard was a hit: Gibson shipped nearly 800 in 1967 alone, making it their best-selling signature guitar of the time. Here, the diamond-shaped soundholes give a clean, modern edge that's nicely echoed by those wicked position markers. Atop that classic slim body, the six-in-line headstock looks remarkably cool and, interestingly, Trini necks feel much more like a Firebird than a 335.

A Trini Lopez Standard would make a perfect guitar for semi-acoustic lovers who want to lay their hands on something a little different – pentatonic noodlers with a canny eye for indie credibility, perhaps.



Trini himself prefered his fully hollow Deluxe model to the Standard, but sales were poor and less than 300 were ever built

MODEL DETAILS

Both original Trini Lopez models were introduced in 1964 and cancelled in 1971

- **TRINI LOPEZ DELUXE**
  Based on the Barney Kessel model, the Deluxe was a fully hollow archtop, with 'diamond' soundholes, twin Florentine cutaways, two humbuckers, two tones, two volumes, a three-way selector and a Gretsch-style standby switch. The tailpiece had an insert with a 'Trini Lopez Model' plaque. The fingerboard markers were slashed diamonds, the headstock was a kicked-back six-per-side design borrowed from the Mk II Firebird – though at least one '64 model had a reversed headstock with banjo-style tuners. It sported a tasteful cherry sunburst finish
- **TRINI LOPEZ STANDARD**
  Diamond soundholes, slashed diamond inlays, a custom tailpiece and a Firebird neck on an ES-335 body complete with centre-block. The fingerboard was bound, but the headstock wasn't. A transparent cherry finish came as standard, but typical mid-60s Gibson custom colours such as Pelham Blue or Burgundy Sparkle do turn up, as do factory Bigsbys

CURRENT MODELS

- **GIBSON MEMPHIS TRINI LOPEZ ES-335**
  A straight copy of the original Standard Trini, sports Burstbucker Pro humbuckers
- **GIBSON MEMPHIS DAVE GROHL ES-335**
  The Foo Fighters man has played a Trini for years and his sig, launched in 2007, differs mostly in that it has a stop bar tailpiece and comes in either Pelham Blue or Gold Metallic

Gibson
Gibson

Vintage SHOWCASE

Gibson ES-330TD 1959 & 1963

The Poor man's 335, or a great guitar in its own right? **RICK BATEY** puts the case for the defence...

For a long, long time the ES-330TD was considered a 'C-grade' vintage Gibson, overshadowed by its classic brother the ES-335 and its upmarket 345 and 355 siblings. The 330's body was fully hollow, lacking the 335's centre-block, so the guitar had less sustain and could be susceptible to feedback. It suffered worse upper-fret access because the neck joined the body in a different place, and the pickups were not height-adjustable. The result: in the early 1990s you could still easily pick up a fine 330 for, say, £500 or £600.

Looking back, that was staggeringly good value for a guitar that came off the production line right next to the ES-335. It was a situation that couldn't last forever. These days, the Gibson ES-330 is one of the most sought-after vintage 'player' guitars around, and nice ones begin at around the £2,500 mark (the equivalent Epiphone, the almost-identical Casino, can sometimes fetch slightly more thanks to its Beatles connection).

Why the turnaround? Well, Keith Richards played one at the historic 1969 Hyde Park concert and Johnny Marr and Elliott Smith, amongst others, were also devotees, so these guitars clearly have an allure that goes beyond the poor man's ES-335 tag.

The fact is ES-330s have tons of character and all that Gibson build quality; no-one much misses playing up past the 17th fret; and compared to the 335 the 330 has a super-lively, almost acoustic-feeling response with a mellow clean sound, great rhythm tones and the rich roar of those single-coil P-90s when cranked into something hot. Sure, they're not cheap anymore – but a late-50s to early-60s one is still roughly the same fraction of the price of a 335. Looking at it that way, you have to say they're still a bargain!

These days, the Gibson ES-330 is one of the most sought-after vintage 'player' guitars around

The ES-330 has its idiosyncrasies. Rhythm/lead pickup imbalance is rife, with the neck pickup often sounding hotter than the bridge, so make sure you can live with it... or simply keep one pickup turned down to 9. Bigsbys are an often-seen factory or custom addition; if using the single-bar type, make sure there's enough break angle over the saddles or you'll be forever popping strings off the bridge.

Single-pickup ES-330Ts from '59-'62, as played by the late Alex Chilton, are not uncommon: they're great guitars, but don't shell out big money, as the value is lower than that of the double-pickup models.

If you've found a 330, don't be worried by the lack of an orange Gibson label inside; they never had one. Check the date of manufacture via the factory order number or 'FON' – visible through the treble f-hole – against a good vintage guitar reference book. Replacement tuners (as on the cherry '63, opposite page) are likely; it's worth changing back to quality Kluson reissues. Make sure valuable parts such as nickel bridges or original knobs haven't been pinched. Beware of that old problem the headstock break, which devalues any Gibson by a considerable margin. Just remember, don't buy a late-60s one without checking that you can live with the narrow neck. Aside from that, it's hard to go wrong.

ES-330 PLAYERS

- **Slim Harpo** Chicago bluesman
- **Grant Green** Blue Note jazzer
- **Walter Becker** Steely Dan
- **Bernard Sumner** New Order
- **Alex Chilton** Big Star
- **William Reid** Jesus And Mary Chain
- **Mark Linkous** Sparklehorse
- **Barrie Cadogan** Little Barrie/ Primal Scream

CURRENT MODELS

- **Gibson Memphis ES-330** 50s body and neck specs with slightly underwound P-90 pickups
- **Gibson Memphis '64 ES-330** Slim taper cutaways and scatter wound Historic, nickel covered P90s
- **Gibson Memphis ES-330L Humbucker** Bigsby B-7 vibrato, custom black VOS finish and PAF-style humbuckers

All the above are limited runs

TIMELINE GIBSON ES-330

1959
The twin-pickup ES-330TD ('Thinline Double') and single-pickup ES-330T introduced. These early ones come with black plastic pickup covers, dot fingerboard markers and distinctively rounded 'Mickey Mouse' body horns (a feature shared with the 335 family). Finishes are sunburst and blonde; the latter demands a big premium

1962
Single-pickup ES-330T discontinued. On the ES-330TD, a cherry finish replaces natural. Slightly slimmer body horns are phased in. Chrome hardware, including pickup covers, arrive by mid-62. Late 62 ushers in small block fretboard markers

1967-69
Burgundy sparkle option (walnut by 1968). By this time, most 330s have very narrow nuts and the value takes a hit

1969
'Full-length' ES-335-proportioned neck fitted – gawky, but useful. This model was reissued by the Gibson Custom Shop

1972
The 330 is discontinued. On a budget? Try an Epiphone Casino from Japan (80s) Korea, or China (2000s)

Friendly Airspace

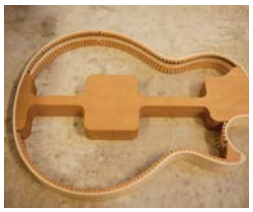
Most regard the midrange push of a slab of mahogany as fundamental to the timeless magic of great Les Paul tone. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** finds out what happens when you introduce a little air into the equation...

RHYTHM
TREBLE
Gibson

Gibson Memphis ES-Les Paul Black Beauty & Epiphone Les Paul Standard Florentine Pro

IN THE FRAME

Gibson Memphis's ES-Les Paul models feature maple/poplar/maple laminate tops, backs and sides with mahogany centre blocks. The mahogany's mass is concentrated around the stress points at the bridge and neck join, as you can see here



The popular history of the electric guitar suggests that during the golden era of the fifties and early sixties, the factories of Fullerton and Kalamazoo were churning out lightweight, highly resonant tone machines of a quality that would never be equalled. However, by the 1970s, the pillars of American guitar manufacturing had well and truly lost their way; they weren't making them like they used to, the wood was heavy and sub-standard and in some instances, the Japanese imports of the period were better guitars.

But the trouble with received wisdom is it's usually a little black and white, and its advocates almost always fail to dig into the details. Firstly, the notion that all vintage American electrics of the golden era are great instruments simply isn't true; some pre-CBS Strats are pretty damn ordinary, and not all PAF pickups sound astonishing.

Indeed, many pickup experts we've spoken to over the years concede that, while the finest examples truly are things of awe and wonder, some original PAFs don't sound very good at all. The higher percentage of hand processes involved in early electric guitar manufacture inevitably introduced a greater degree of variance between one instrument off the production line and the next, and those 'Friday afternoon' guitars do exist.

And as far as weight and resonance go, this writer has played a '55 Strat that could have anchored an ocean liner, yet also owned a '73 Tele Custom that weighed less than 7lb and rang like a grand piano.

Not all stereotypes are true then, but it's fair to state that the Gibson Les Paul Standard is on the heavy end of the spectrum when it comes to iconic production solidbodies. It's always been that way, too. Of a sample of 28 1958-60 instruments featured in the Les Paul obsessive's bible *The Beauty Of The 'Burst* by Yasuhiko Iwanade, weights range from 8.1-9.7lbs, with an average of 8.86lbs.

Indeed, the 1959 'Burst formerly owned by Paul Kossoff, that Steve Clarke pores over in microscopic detail

For 2015, Gibson's Memphis factory rang the changes in a measured, player-friendly manner

The ES-Les Paul features a laminate top, back and sides

The f-hole logo features on non-reissue Memphis models

A trio of MHS humbuckers adorns the Black Beauty

elsewhere in this issue weighs in at a not unsubstantial 8.68lbs.

While many of us have learnt to grin and bear a reasonable amount of weight, few guitarists want to play a 12lb Les Paul, and there has clearly been a consistent demand for a lighter Lester for a number of years now, as Gibson's numerous attempts to provide one seem to corroborate.

Introduced back in 1987, the Les Paul Custom Lite shaved 5/8-inch off the body depth, while recent years have seen various weight-relief methods appearing on USA LPs, ranging from nine rather crude holes routed in the mahogany before the maple cap is attached to full-on tone chambering. Then there was the halfway house of 2012's 'modern weight relief', with its multiple elliptical chambers.

The f-hole truth

The idea of going the whole hog and equipping a Les Paul with f-holes is nothing new either; the bling-y Les Paul Bantam Elite and Bantam Elite Plus (later renamed Florentine Standard and Florentine Plus; metal flake-finished models were re-christened the Elite Diamond Sparkle) were introduced
two decades ago by the Nashville Custom Shop. Noel Gallagher's use of a silver Diamond Sparkle model on Oasis' Be Here Now tour was the high point for a range thats sparkle had fizzled out and been duly discontinued by 1998.

Since then, there have also been limited edition Epiphone Les Paul ES models and a variety of compact Epiphone and Gibson ES instruments, such as the ES-339, that tend to possess a little Les Paul in their sonic DNA if not in their appearance.

While both guitars here have precedents in the Gibson and Epiphone catalogues, at present the Florentine Pro is the lone semi-hollow Les Paul in the Epiphone ranks. Gibson's Memphis factory, on the other hand, features a dozen variations on the ES-Les Paul in its 2015 line-up, including a bass – not bad for a model that debuted as recently as last year.

While Gibson USA's Nashville-manufactured 2015 line-up provoked a remarkable furore on internet forums well before instruments even made their way into people's hands, a couple of hundred miles south west along the I-40 down in Memphis, under the auspices of Mike Voltz, a quieter evolution continues to produce some of the most inspiring and evocative production-line semi-acoustic guitars in the world.

The 2015 model year saw Gibson Memphis ring the changes in a measured, player-friendly manner. As a result, the ES-Les Paul Black Beauty features a thickened transition between the neck and headstock for greater strength and stability, a bone nut to aid both tone and tuning, rolled neck binding for a more played-in feel straight out of the box, Orange Drop capacitors with less treble cut, old-style Grover Milk Bottle Rotomatic tuners, a Historic-spec truss rod and an f-hole engraved truss-rod cover – the latter now featuring on all non-Historic Gibson Memphis models.

The eagle-eyed among you will also notice that the medium jumbo fretwire on ES-Les Pauls now extends over the binding for a little more fretboard real estate on the outside of the first and sixth strings.

Age concern

Gibson's VOS finish treatment is considerably less divisive than the kind of throw-it-down-the-stairs 'ageing' that gets at least half of the guitar buying public rather het up while the other half are reaching for their credit cards. Our Black Beauty certainly looks the part, though on very close inspection the top does appear more like the effect of half an hour spent rubbing away with some steel wool rather than decades of gigging. That said, it'll soon settle down with some playing time.

Where the Gibson ES-Les Paul employs a maple/poplar/maple laminate frame in traditional ES-335 style, then adds a mahogany centre block with most of its mass concentrated under the stress points of the bridge and neck join (see sidebar), the Epiphone Florentine is more of a hollowed-out Les Paul Standard with a chambered mahogany back glued to a maple cap with a pretty AAA flame veneer.

In practice, the two contrasting approaches have produced >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gibson Memphis ES-Les Paul Black Beauty

Gretsch was doing the chambered, compact single-cut thing back in the 1950s, and the **G6128T-TVP Power Jet £2,249** is a vintage-inspired model voiced to rock, with TV Jones Power'Tron pickups. For a compact ES experience with a hint of Les Paul in its accent, audition the **Gibson Memphis ES-339 Satin £1,699**; with a little T-Cut and elbow grease it'll soon take on the VOS look.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Epiphone Les Paul Standard Florentine Pro

Like the Gibson equivalent, **Epiphone's compact ES-339 Pro £399** squeezes plenty of ES flavour and a twist of Les Paul into a more compact package. Gretsch's hardtail **G5435 Electromatic Pro Jet £380** features a chambered basswood body and bags of retro growl and jangle, thanks to a pair of Black Top Filter'Tron pickups.

instruments of broadly similar weights, though the Epiphone's poly finish has that 'dipped in glass', heavy-gloss appearance and feel that's far removed from vintage spec.

Ironically, though, it's the softer corners of Epiphone's new ProBucker pickup covers that are the closest to vintage PAFs in shape; while the Memphis Historic Spec units are unpotted with mismatched coil windings, and thus closer to being period correct on the inside, for the time being, Gibson Memphis is persevering with the sharper corners and more rounded edges that characterise most generic modern humbucker covers.

We wonder how long it will take before the 'right' PAF pickup covers come trickling down from the new £5,000 and upwards Gibson Custom True Historic range to the Memphis line. On a three-pickup Les Paul, it would really make a visual difference, but enough about looks; how do these instruments sound and feel?

In use

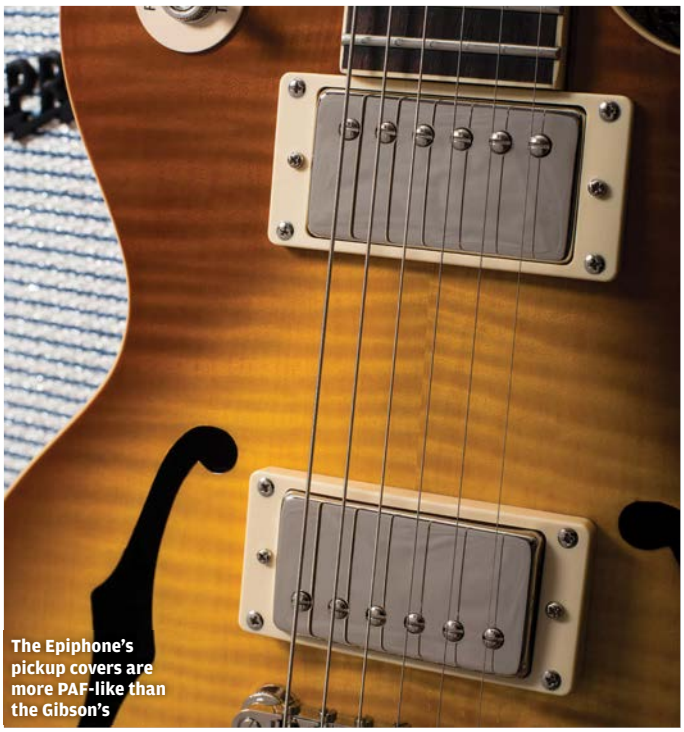
The Epiphone's Slim Taper 1960s D profile gives away only 3mm in 12th-fret depth to the Gibson, but the Black Beauty's C shape feels much more rounded and substantial and this, in combination with the nitrocellulose finish, makes for an instrument with a much more vintage-like personality in comparison to the Epiphone's more generic feel. Given the price differential, you'd expect as much, but that's not to say the Florentine is a bad guitar; far from it. The Epiphone is a comfortable, speedy player that will appeal to the majority of guitarists.

Compared to our reference Gibson ES-335 with Mojo Pickups PAF replicas installed, where the larger-bodied instrument is creamier – and indeed Creamier – sounding, the ES-Les Paul is more Page than Clapton, with more of a snarl in the highs and upper-mids. Compared directly to a solidbody Les Paul Standard, somewhat predictably, there's less midrange thump and authority in low-register chords from the Black Beauty.

However, there's a wonderfully vocal, expressive voice for blues soloing in any of the pickup positions, while the middle position is of course given a little more push than you'd get out of a twin-pickup Les Paul, because of the mandatory combination of Alnico II bridge and Alnico III middle pickups.

Though the Les Paul Custom has often been a popular choice for players who use loads of gain, in this incarnation we'd recommend exercising a little more restraint – the pickups

Pull the Florentine's volume controls for coil-split tones



The Epiphone's pickup covers are more PAF-like than the Gibson's

The Epiphone's double vacuum wax-potted pickups are considerably more resistant to unwanted feedback

do squeal a bit with combinations of high volume, gainy drive and proximity to the amplifier, with the neck unit the most prone to microphony. It's suited better to expressive blues and classic rock than it is to heavy metal.

With sensible levels of drive, the middle setting is lots of fun, and we probably spent more time playing with the switch in this position than we ever would with either a regular ES-335 or Les Paul. For grungy powerchord riffs and rhythms, it's thick and gnarly without turning into mush, while higher-register lead playing has a hint of cocked wah tonality – we reckon it would make a great main voice for a guitarist in a riffy, alt-rock trio, where that extra thickness can really fill out the sound in the way the bridge pickup alone isn't able to.

Both guitars look fantastic when strapped on, but – perhaps inevitably – stripped of the dense mahogany that makes a regular Les Paul so body-heavy, there's some neck dive in both instances, so you'll need to be judicious in your choice of strap.

In a straight A/B, as you might perhaps expect, the Epiphone's additional mahogany translates into greater warmth, but the overall sounds are less sophisticated, and as ever the differences between the two instruments get more apparent as you wind up towards gig volume. The more affordable guitar sounds fine in isolation, and it's perhaps somewhat unfair to expect it to compete sonically with a considerably more expensive instrument that will always have more of that certain something when it comes down to character and voice.

All that said, though, the Epiphone's double vacuum wax-potted pickups are considerably more resistant to unwanted feedback and can cope with much higher levels of gain. In addition, though engaging the coil-splits brings a significant drop in level, there's a sweet, light funkiness to the neck and middle settings, and some almost sixties, Kinks-like brattishness to the bridge when used in split-coil mode with EL84s in overdrive.

Top hat knobs aren't the easiest to pull up with sweaty mitts in a gig environment – speed knobs would have probably been a more practical selection. Having said that, it's to the Epiphone Florentine's great credit that it isn't in any way embarrassed in the company of Gibson's Memphis Black Beauty.

KEY FEATURES

Gibson Memphis ES-Les Paul Black Beauty

PRICE £2,899 (including hardcase)
DESCRIPTION Single-cutaway semi-hollow electric guitar, made in USA
BUILD Maple/poplar/maple laminate body with mahogany centre block, rounded C-profile mahogany glued-in neck, 304mm/12" radius Richlite fingerboard with mother of pearl block inlays, bone nut and 22 medium jumbo frets
HARDWARE Gold-plated TonePros AVR-2 bridge and lightweight stopbar tailpiece, Grover Milk Bottle Rotomatic machineheads
ELECTRICS 3x MHS humbucking pickups, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, 2x volume, 2x tone
SCALE LENGTH 628mm/24.75"
NECK WIDTH 43mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
WEIGHT 7.0lbs/3.1kg
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES Ebony VOS lacquer only
CONTACT Gibson
www.gibson.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Drop-dead cool looks
+ Wonderful classic blues-rock tones from the MHS 'buckers
– VOS treatment not the most subtle or convincing we've seen
– Neck dive
– Unpotted pickups limit versatility

With sensible levels of gain there are killer tones on tap from this gorgeous guitar. Just be sure it's for you before shelling out

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Epiphone Les Paul Standard Florentine Pro

PRICE £459 (including hardcase)
DESCRIPTION Single-cutaway semi-hollow electric, made in Indonesia
BUILD Chambered mahogany body with maple top and AAA-grade flame maple veneer, 1960s SlimTaper D-profile mahogany glued-in neck, 304mm/12" radius rosewood fingerboard with pearloid trapezoid inlays, synthetic nut and 22 medium jumbo frets
HARDWARE Nickel LockTone tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece, Epiphone Deluxe vintage-style machineheads
ELECTRICS Epiphone ProBucker-3 (bridge) and ProBucker-2 (neck) humbucking pickups, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, 2x volume with pull/push coil splits, 2x tone
SCALE LENGTH 628mm/24.75"
NECK WIDTH 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35mm at nut, 52.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 6.8lbs/3.0kg
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES Honey Burst (as reviewed), Iced Tea, Faded Cherry Burst, Trans Black, Vintage Sunburst, Wine Red
CONTACT Epiphone
www.epiphone.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great value for money
+ Interesting array of coil-split and humbucking sounds
– Neck dive
– Sound and feel a little generic compared to the 'real thing'

If you fancy a Les Paul but don't want to break either your back or the bank, this is worth an audition. It handles high gain and high volume situations well, too

8/10

GIBSON ES-339 £1,999
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Gibson ES-339

Essentially a scaled-down ES-335 the ES-339 offers a more focused voice and far more huggability. Review by **MARTYN CASSERLY**

Review from **January 2009**

Picture the scene: you're one of the biggest guitar companies in the world, with nearly every one of your products regarded as an iconic classic. The problem is that your guitars were all designed 40 or 50 years ago, and no one seems to be demanding anything new. How do you remain an innovative company and yet try to break new boundaries and build some new classics?

Well, what about stripping down your best-selling model, giving it barely a lick of paint, hollowing it out, and swapping the pickups? Done: the Les Paul BFG. OK, what about a guitar with digital outputs for each individual string? Done: the H6. Ah – a self-tuning guitar with little motors and an onboard computer! Been there, done it: the Robot models.

So rather than building a solar-powered SG, Gibson has simply shrunk an ES-335 body down to make the ES-339, which sits neatly in size between a Les Paul and the aforementioned ES-335. Brilliant in its simplicity, but does it work?

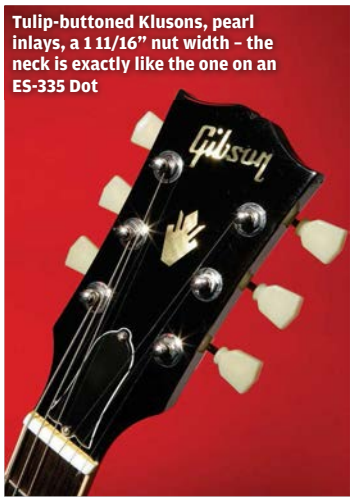
ES-339

On opening up the plush Gibson hardcase, the first word that leaps to mind is 'wow'. The ES-339 is a looker, and no mistake. The next thought is probably to wonder whether the case is in fact a Tardis and that this is simply a 335 that's further away than you thought. Reach out with your hands, though, and you'll discover no temporal shifts, simply a smaller-bodied semi that feels more at home to a solidbody player such as myself. Whereas most players wouldn't dare challenge the beauty and majesty of the ES-335, it certainly can be a handful – or even an armful, with that big old body. The ES-339 is 13.75" wide, not 16", has been designed to appeal to those who want that semi-solid sound without the width, and I think it's safe to say that Gibson may well have struck gold. Shape-wise, it looks very much like an ES-335, with a fat round bottom, skinny waist, and double cutaways – although the ES-339's ears seem a bit more pointy than the rounded Mickey Mouse ears found on the late-50s and Dot reissues of its bigger brother. Construction-wise, the ES-339 features a laminated maple top, back and rims built around a maple centre-block – the cornerstone of the Gibson semi-solid tone.

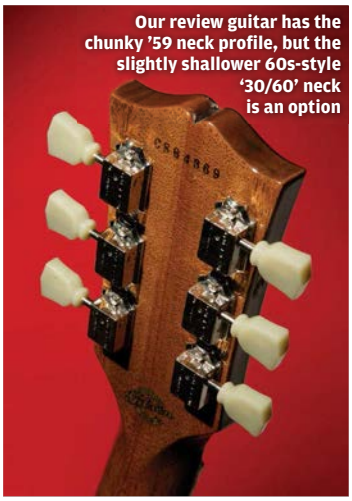
These are all bound together with a single-ply cream binding, as is the mahogany neck with its 22-fret rosewood fingerboard. The work is very tidy, and gives the guitar a definite vintage vibe.

The ES-339 is designed to appeal to those who want a semi-solid sound without the wide body. Gibson may have struck gold

The '59 profile neck is chunky and a little alien in the hand at first, especially if you're used to playing a modern rock guitar, but it soon becomes second >



Tulip-buttoned Klusons, pearl inlays, a 1 11/16" nut width – the neck is exactly like the one on an ES-335 Dot



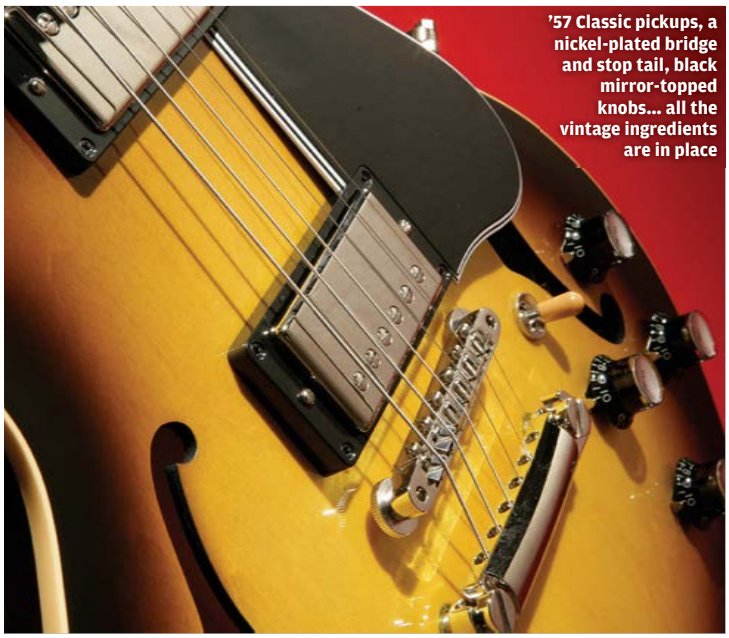
Our review guitar has the chunky '59 neck profile, but the slightly shallower 60s-style '30/60' neck is an option

KEY FEATURES

ES-339

- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-solid electric guitar. Made in the USA
- **PRICE** £1,999
- **BUILD** Laminated maple top, back and rims, maple centre-block with spruce contour braces, cream single-ply binding, mahogany neck with 22-fret rosewood fingerboard. ABR-1 Tune-O-Matic bridge, stop tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** Twin '57 Classic humbuckers, volume and tone controls for each with Memphis tone circuit, three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
- **ACTION** (as supplied) 12th fret treble 3mm 12th fret bass 4mm
- **WEIGHT** 3.63kg/8lb
- **LEFT-HANDERS** £POA
- **FINISHES** Vintage sunburst, caramel burst, antique red
- **CONTACT** Gibson www.gibson.com

Mahogany neck with a single cream-bound body made of laminated maple


'57 Classic pickups, a nickel-plated bridge and stop tail, black mirror-topped knobs... all the vintage ingredients are in place

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Tokai ES-150 £995

A 335 clone from the legendary Japanese manufacturer Tokai. Beautiful looks, classic tones and affordable pricing

Vox Virage DC £2,095

Lovely semi from the rejuvenated Vox guitar line. lightweight, big tones and eye-poppingly styled. it costs a fair few bob, though

Gibson CS-336 £1,899

At first glance, this custom shop model looks similar to the ES-339, but construction-wise it's closer to a chambered Les Paul and sounds more controlled. A good thing? That's up to you

nature and plays very well indeed. String bending is effortless, and the feel of the neck makes vibrato easier than on many others I've played recently. Sadly, the dreaded variable Gibson quality control crops up as some of the frets are a little sharp in places, and those with a heavy-handed playing style may find the high E string slipping off the frets – so definitely try to play one before you buy.

Humbuckers are of course the order of the day, and the two fitted here are '57 Classics, controlled via twin volume and tone pots that feature the Memphis tone circuit, which stops the high end dropping off as you turn down the volume. It works well, too.

Strapped on, the 339 feels well-balanced. It's certainly not light, but the weight is reasonable. Strummed acoustically, the ES-339 rings out as you'd expect, so let's see what it sounds like with a bit of oomph.

Sounds

It's fair to say that most electric guitars we test tend to spend a little less time on the clean channel than the drive. With the ES-339, though, it was hard to drag myself away from the variety of tones available simply from the guitar by blending the pickups together. Plugged into a Cornford Carrera set clean, and with a bit of reverb going on, the 339 just sings. There's snap in the bridge, a bit of honk in the middle, and warmth aplenty in the neck. A sound that particularly caught my attention was with both pickups on, the neck tone set around 3-4 and the bridge tone set to 0 – it's a warm, jazzy sound that still has an edge and really opens up when strummed. For mellow noodling and ballads, you really will have to go a long way to beat this instrument.

Add a bit more bridge pickup into this twin-pickup mix and a passable acoustic-type tone is produced, and thanks to the great playability even a strictly electric player like myself can sound half-decent. Increasing the gain slightly and opening up the neck pickup by itself leads us unexpectedly into David Gilmour country. OK, obviously the master mostly uses a Stratocaster, but think of the tone from the fabled *Another Brick In The Wall* solo, played, as all fans know, on a Les Paul Goldtop with P-90s – the ES-339 gets very close. Those trademark Gilmour bends are also easy to play, and for the most part the tuning stays put.

Bluesy grit comes naturally with a touch more added gain, and the guitar is quite happy to get down and dirty with plenty of attitude. Treat the bridge pickup to a bit of aggressive strumming and you're rewarded with a nasty barroom tone that will get a crowd of drunken rednecks dancing and fighting in no time.

Classic rock, of course, exudes out of every pore of the ES-339 and Gary Moore, Thin Lizzy and Lynyrd Skynyrd tunes can all be faithfully reproduced with ease. But this is no stuck-in-the-past axe, and slight adjustments to the volume and tone unleash Oasis, Stereophonics, and even U2. You could fiddle about for hours with it and still be surprised with the sounds it produces, but pretty much all of them would be highly usable.

Verdict

Sure, the ES-339 is not a Les Paul or a 335, but that's the point. This new addition to the Gibson family takes some of the best aspects of its prodigious siblings and creates a new voice all its own. There's loads of sustain, open breathy tones, warm jazzy cleans, punky roars, fast playability, easy big bends, and musical feedback just waiting to be tamed. Also, due to Gibson having a distribution centre in Europe, a new pricing structure has been put in place. We can see the benefits of this by the ES-339 retailing at £1,999 – a steal for a semi of this quality, from a brand that tends to keep its worth in the second-hand market.

In short, the ES-339 is a real cracker that could gain a huge following, and deservedly so. Fabulous tones, classy looks, a truly great feel, reasonable price... it's got just about everything.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A huge variety of fabulous tones
+ Smart Memphis tone circuit fitted
+ Classy looks
+ A fresh Gibson classic in the making

– Fret edges are a little sharp in places
– Those with a heavy playing style may find the high E slips off the frets

The ES-339 is not a Les Paul or a 335, but that's the point. This new addition to the Gibson family takes some of the best aspects of its prodigious siblings and creates a new voice all its own

9/10

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL CITONE

D'Angelico

New York

Jake Cinninger
of Umphrey's McGee

The EX-SS packs a lot of punch in its 15-inch body, the smallest of all the D'Angelico archtops. Warm, resonant, and versatile across its pickups, the SS is a lightweight hollowbody perfectly suited for rock, blues, jazz, and all the nameless places in between.

WWW.DANGELICOGUITARS.COM

GIBSON ES-195 £1,499
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Gibson ES-195

All the way from Memphis: Gibson's rock 'n' roll themed semi-acoustic is a great all-rounder. Review by **MARCUS LEADLEY**

Review from **October 2013**

It's always good to see Gibson – one of the true pioneers of electric guitar building – go back to its roots and have a crack at reinventing its past. This ES-195 is based on the classic ES-175, a guitar that the company first put into production way back in 1949.

Gibson hollowbody archtops were the instruments of the jazz and dance band musicians of the 30 and 40s. They were among the first to be fitted with pickups and became the available option for the new breed of rock 'n' roll players who came marching over the hills in the early 1950s to take command of the world of amplified music. Gibson's somewhat conservative styling was soon being challenged by the hotrod looks of Gretsch and Rickenbacker, and the company responded with new thinline and semi-acoustic instruments. Not wanting to offend its traditional users, the styling was generally pretty demure – but the design imagination was let loose when it came to the all-new solidbody models.

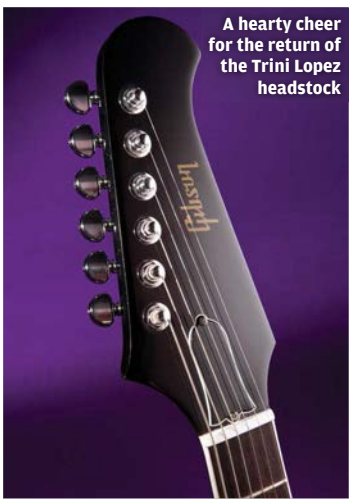
Had someone at Gibson around 1957 decided to style up a market alternative to the Gretsch 6120, they might have produced this ES-195 – especially the Bigsby-equipped trans amber version with its gold hardware. The ebony version we have here presents another take on the rock 'n' roll theme: solid black with white body binding and chrome hardware.

The use of the six-in-a-line reverse Firebird style headstock is a brave choice. It's not the first time it's been used for a semi-acoustic, as it appeared on the Trini Lopez Standard signature model in 1964 and the shortlived Vegas Standard semi-hollowbody in 2006. It certainly differentiates it from its cousin the ES-175. You'd hardly call it the most attractive headstock on the planet, but at least it has a heritage.

For a guitar in this price bracket there are one or two unacceptable finishing issues: the 'orange peel' roughness of the nitrocellulose lacquer around the edge of the headstock, and rough edges around the neck/body joint with the top and the inside edges of the f-holes. The binding is also slightly crimped on the leading edge of the Florentine cutaway. These points aside, the ES-195 is well turned out. The maple neck is beautifully finished, and the 22-fret rosewood fingerboard is perfectly fretted and bound. The combination of the 12" radius and the 24.75" scale delivers a feel that is classically Gibson. Overall, it's a slimmer neck than one might expect. The body of the ES-195 is ¾" thinner than the ES-175. It's hard to assess the sonic impact, but the top end seems slightly tighter. The principle benefit is that the guitar feels less bulky, especially on the strap. The majority of instruments of this design have always been made entirely from laminates because of the shaping >

Had Gibson decided to style up an alternative to the Gretsch 6120 in 1957, they might have produced the ES-195

The body is laminated, like an ES-175, but it's slightly slimmer



A hearty cheer for the return of the Trini Lopez headstock

KEY FEATURES

Gibson ES-195

- **DESCRIPTION** Hollowbody electric guitar. Made in USA
- **PRICE** £1,499 (ebony), £1,999 (trans amber) including hardshell case
- **BUILD** Laminated maple/basswood/maple back, sides and top; set maple neck with 22-fret bound rosewood fingerboard with spit diamond pearloid inlays. White/black body binding (top). Corin nut, chrome hardware, Grover mini tuners, roller Tune-O-Matic bridge on ebony floating base.
- **ELECTRICS** Two Gibson P-94 Alnico II single-coil pickups, independent tone and volume controls, three-way pickup selector
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/629mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.2mm at nut, 52.4mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.5mm at first fret, 35.8mmm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **ACTION** (as supplied) 12th fret treble 1.8mm 12th fret bass 2.5mm
- **WEIGHT** 3.5kg/7.75lb
- **FINISHES** Ebony, trans amber
- **CONTACT** Gibson **www.gibson.com**

Pickups are humbucker-sized P-94 single coils with Alnico II magnets

Roller bridge saddles help keep the Bigsby's drawbacks to a minimum

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gibson ES-175 £2,899

With 20 frets, a slightly deeper body and '57 Classic humbuckers, the modern 175 – the inspiration for the ES-195 – gives a fuller tone that still rocks

Duesenberg Imperial £2,825

Another hollowbody styled for rock 'n' roll. Laminated spruce top, laminated maple back and sides and a bridge humbucker and neck single coil for extra flexibility

Gretsch G6120 Eddie Cochran Signature £3,022

A classic for country and rock: hollowbody, Bigsby, and single-coil pickups. Opt for the slightly cheaper standard 6120 if Filter'Tron humbuckers do it for you

and bending required. The ES-195 is the same, but it's worth noting that Gibson's Memphis plant, which specialises in semi-acoustics, still produces the maple/basswood/maple laminates; indeed, the original press from the Kalamazoo plant is still in use.

The Gibson ES-195 sounds brilliant. It delivers as a rock 'n' roller but also has the flexibility for jazz, country, and blues

The electrics are straightforward: two P-94 single-coil pickups are controlled by a three-way selector and a pair of tone and volume controls. The black/chrome pickup covers are very stylish. The Bigsby vibrola is a classic bit of kit, but even the well-seated ebony floating bridge with its roller saddles will not keep this monster in tune if you treat it like a contemporary tremolo. Learning to tweak your tuning on the fly is all part of the game.

ES-339

The acoustic tone is rich and bright, and there's a pleasing midrange dryness that translates into clarity and a defined pick-edge articulation. It's also more than loud enough for some late-night unplugged songwriting. If you've never played a quality semi-acoustic loaded with single-coil pickups, the tone can be a revelation. Humbuckers tend to smooth things out a bit and create a bias towards the electric tone, while good single coils are more like microphones; they bring all of the acoustic character onto the soundstage. Then, when you wind up the gain, the additional electrical grit simply makes a good thing great.

The basic sound of the ES-195 is beautifully complex, with all the body cavity and hardware resonances mixing with the chiming metal tone of new strings. The P-94 delivers a fairly flat response with less of a midrange hump than the P-90, and we like the way it promotes the guitar's natural character. The brightness suits rock 'n' roll, and there's plenty of twang for country. There's jazziness here too, especially from the neck pickup. The pickups are wired so that the middle position is out of phase and hum-cancelling. This is very useful at high volume or in the studio, and it adds an additional level of tonal variation and presence.

Things really take off when you start to drive the amp, and when the ES-195 starts to break up the transition from subtle to angry can be nuanced with ease. Lower volume settings with plenty of gain create a beautiful wall of sound, from massive rock chords with a thudding bass end to leadlines with all the classic Gibson authority. Playing with feedback using a solidbody generally takes either a lot of volume/gain or high-gain pedals, with the latter often adding a synthetic edge. Move close to the amp with this guitar, and you can set off body-shaking interactions at less than ear-splitting levels. There's some real voodoo here when the electric spirit takes command.

Verdict

This is an excellent guitar. There are a few minor issues, but the amount of hand-finishing at Gibson Memphis means there will always be minor differences between instruments, so ideally you'd try to pick your favourite from several examples. These are not guitars that can be turned out in bulk using CNC machines, and the element of craftsmanship is reflected in the price and the sound. The ES-195 sounds brilliant. It delivers as a rock 'n' roller but also has the flexibility for jazz, country, blues and sound sculpting.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Basic sound is rich and complex
+ Middle pickup position is hum cancelling, useful at high volume
+ This guitar harbours serious mojo

– A few finishing issues
– Not the easiest to keep in tune
– Cranked it's a bit of a feedback monster

The ES-195 sounds brilliant. It delivers for rock 'n' roll, but also turns its hand to jazz, blues and experimental noise-making

9/10

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ELECTRIC GUITAR

Gibson Luther Dickinson ES-335

Marry together the centre-block ES-335 and the snarly P-90, and you've got a compelling instrument. Review by **MARCUS LEADLEY**

Review from **February 2014**

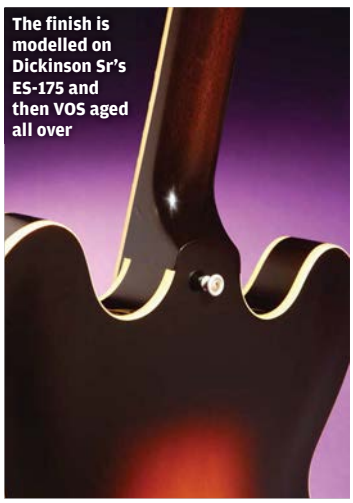
We tend to forget that many of Gibson's classic designs of the 1950s were solutions to the real-world problem of feedback; bigger gigs, more powerful amps and the onset of rock 'n' roll meant it was a serious issue for the jazz box designs of the 1930s and 40s. Les Paul's solidbody model of 1952 nailed the problem, but it was a radical solution, and for pro players used to a rich, warm hollowbody tone, Les Pauls were not the answer.

Midway though the 50s, the thinline ES-225 was introduced. The theory was simple – enough body space to create a semi-acoustic character but with a smaller resonant chamber, giving less feedback potential. The idea worked to a degree, and it subsequently led to the slimline ES-330 design of 1958. These were great in the studio and for mid-sized club gigs, but it was the ES-335, introduced in the same year, that delivered the right balance of tone, playability and control. It did this by combining hollow and solidbody characteristics with a solid maple block running all the way from the front of the guitar to the back, stiffening the top and dividing the body cavity into two smaller, unconnected chambers.

It was feedback control that initially drew Luther Dickinson to the ES-335; his North Mississippi Allstars play loud. He loved the ES-175 he inherited from his father Jim Dickinson, former guitarist with the Dixie Flyers, session musician and producer, but the 175 simply could not cope. The solution was a Gibson Memphis ES-335 kitted out to look and sound like dad's ES-175.

This is one lovely-looking electric guitar. The nitrocellulose finish is a late 50s vintage brown/tobaccoburst and the aged cream body binding frames it beautifully. Like all 335s, the body is made from laminated maple, but the centre block is a single piece. The neck is quarter-sawn mahogany and the 22-fret rosewood fingerboard is bound to match the body. The dot position markers are period-correct to the late 1950s. Everything from the Klusons and the headstock inlay to the amber-top control knobs and the Bigsby vibrola tells you this is a class act. At the same time, this guitar is not a normal 335 reissue. The basic 335 always has humbuckers; this one, however, sports dogear P-90s. This is Dickinson's principal request, as the ES-175 was introduced soon after the end of WW2 with P-90 single coils, the standard Gibson pickup until the introduction of the humbucker in 1957. P-90s deliver a clean, bright tone and convey a good deal of the guitar's natural acoustic character. The midrange is quite prominent, which works famously for biting lead tones, and there's plenty of gutsy crunch on offer; however, they're susceptible to mains hum and need >

The North Mississippi Allstars play loud: the solution was a 335 kitted out to look and sound like Dickinson's father's 175



The finish is modelled on Dickinson Sr's ES-175 and then VOS aged all over

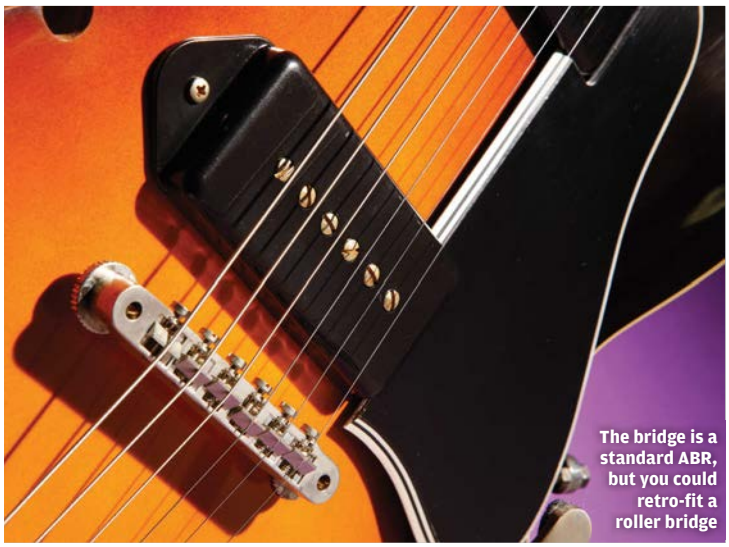
The machineheads are Klusons with single-ring plastic 'tulip' buttons

KEY FEATURES

Gibson Luther Dickinson ES-335

- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-hollow electric guitar. Made in USA
- **PRICE** £2,299
- **BUILD** Twin chamber semi-hollow body made from a maple/poplar/maple laminate. Mahogany set neck (mortise and tenon) with maple spline. 12" radius, 22-fret bound rosewood fingerboard with pearloid dot markers. Aged cream body binding (top and back). Corian nut, nickel hardware, Kluson tuners, ABR Tune-O-Matic bridge, aluminium Bigsby B7 vibrola tailpiece.
- **ELECTRICS** Two Gibson P-90 Alnico II single-coil pickups, independent tone and volume controls, three-way pickup selector
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/629mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.8mm at nut, 51.8mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.6mm at first fret, 24.8mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **ACTION AS SUPPLIED** 12th fret treble 1.8mm 12th fret bass 2mm
- **WEIGHT** 8lbs/3.63kg
- **FINISHES** Jim Dickinson Burst
- **CONTACT** Gibson **www.gibson.com**

The Bigsby is a B7 with the second tension bar for firm downwards bridge pressure


The bridge is a standard ABR, but you could retro-fit a roller bridge

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Gibson ES-335 Dot £2899

The regular vintage 335 reissue from Gibson Memphis with humbuckers and a stoptail bridge

Duesenberg Fullerton CC Eagle £2695

Built from maple laminate with a central sustain block, this boasts a P90 at the neck and a humbucker at the bridge to give the best of both worlds. Duesenberg Deluxe tremolo also fitted

Epiphone Riviera Custom P-93 £369

Maple laminate body with mahogany centre block and a Bigsby. For P90s you'll need to go for this custom model, and it has three! It's a good way into the vintage semi-acoustic feel and sound on a budget

to be paired with a good amp for their sound to be properly showcased.

The neck is a peach, copied directly from the vintage ES-175. It's a little fuller than a '60s slim taper, but not really chunky. Add a 12" radius board, medium-gauge frets and the easy feel afforded by the 24.75" Gibson scale and you've got a responsive, easy-playing guitar. It balances perfectly on a strap but, surprisingly, it's unbalanced on the knee; there's too much weight at the tail and gravity tends to carry it backwards.

Sounds

The acoustic tone rings out nicely, with surprisingly forward mids and a dry honkiness to the sound that favours the pick edge. Dickinson says his playing style is based on translating acoustic technique to the electric ('really loud electric guitar. Loud but clean'), and his go-to sound is the middle position with both pickups on – so let's start there.

In this mode the pickups are noise-cancelling. The clean sound is rounded and warm and yes, it sounds a lot like the acoustic tone, but the lows are restrained and the top end is rounded out. It's nothing like that quintessential out-of-phase Knopfler Strat quack, but some of the same characteristics are present and to my mind it has many more uses. Here the highs are sweet but not biting, while the neck pickup is where you go if you want to explore the deeper end of the guitar; for upper-mid honk, switch down to the bridge.

It soon becomes apparent that the best way to play this guitar is to turn everything on the amp up full, use the tone controls subtractively to get your basic sound right, and then control everything from the guitar in true vintage style. If it's too loud, use a smaller amp! Backing off the volume cleans things up beautifully and you can really make the amp crunch and splutter as it starts to distort.

More gain brings out the rockier side of the blues. The guitar still has the underlying character of a 335 with a full, bassy twang but you won't get that super-smooth Larry Carlton thing or the Alvin Lee or BB King tones without humbuckers. The P90s give the guitar a much more gnarly edge, something ideally suited to a heavy-handed playing style with elements of John Lee Hooker or Otis Rush thrown in. Playing on the neck pickup with the guitar's tone fractionally wound off straight into a hot amp is fantastic fun that delivers a real sense of '70s blues rock perfection.

Dickinson plays fingerstyle most of the time and he's an aficionado of bottleneck and open tunings, so this 335 has to be able to cope with DADGAD, open C# and a bunch of other drop tunings. While he's essentially a blues player with many classic influences, there's a contemporary eclectic thread that reflects his upbringing. He's not afraid of weird-arse noise and cites the Cramps as a seminal influence – and this guitar can rise to the challenge. The feel is pretty loose to start with and the bass strings start flapping like rubber bands when you tune then down... and they sound seriously mean. At the risk of overworking the term 'authentic', that's the best way to describe the sound and feel when you get the bottleneck onto the strings, and if you want to push on through into feedback then the Bigsby really comes into its own because you can make the 335 rumble and wail. However, the bridge doesn't have roller saddles – the whole bridge articulates on its posts – so too much whammy use can put you out of tune very quickly.

Verdict

This is a really hard guitar to put down. It looks, feels and plays exactly like an instrument with an illustrious pedigree should; all the controls work brilliantly and you can work with them to sculpt great sounds as the P90s really bring out the acoustic character of the 335 platform. For controllable vintage blues it's a winner – and it can handle folk, rock, jazz, country and sonic explorations too. If you want to use a semi-acoustic in anger but humbuckers don't do it for you, it's an obvious solution. It's not cheap, but I'd quite happily slim down the collection of lesser name-brand guitars if it meant I could add one of these to the stable. The absence of any obvious Luther Dickinson branding is another plus: without having to state its signature connection too loudly, this is simply a great guitar in its own right.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ It delivers '70s blues rock perfection
+ Middle pickup setting is noise cancelling
+ Signature branding is subtle
+ P90s supply an authentic gnarly edge

– Bigsby doesn't have a roller saddles
– Those P90s are susceptible to the old enemy of mains hum

It looks, feels and plays exactly like a guitar of pedigree and the P90s really bring out the acoustic character of the 335 platform

9/10

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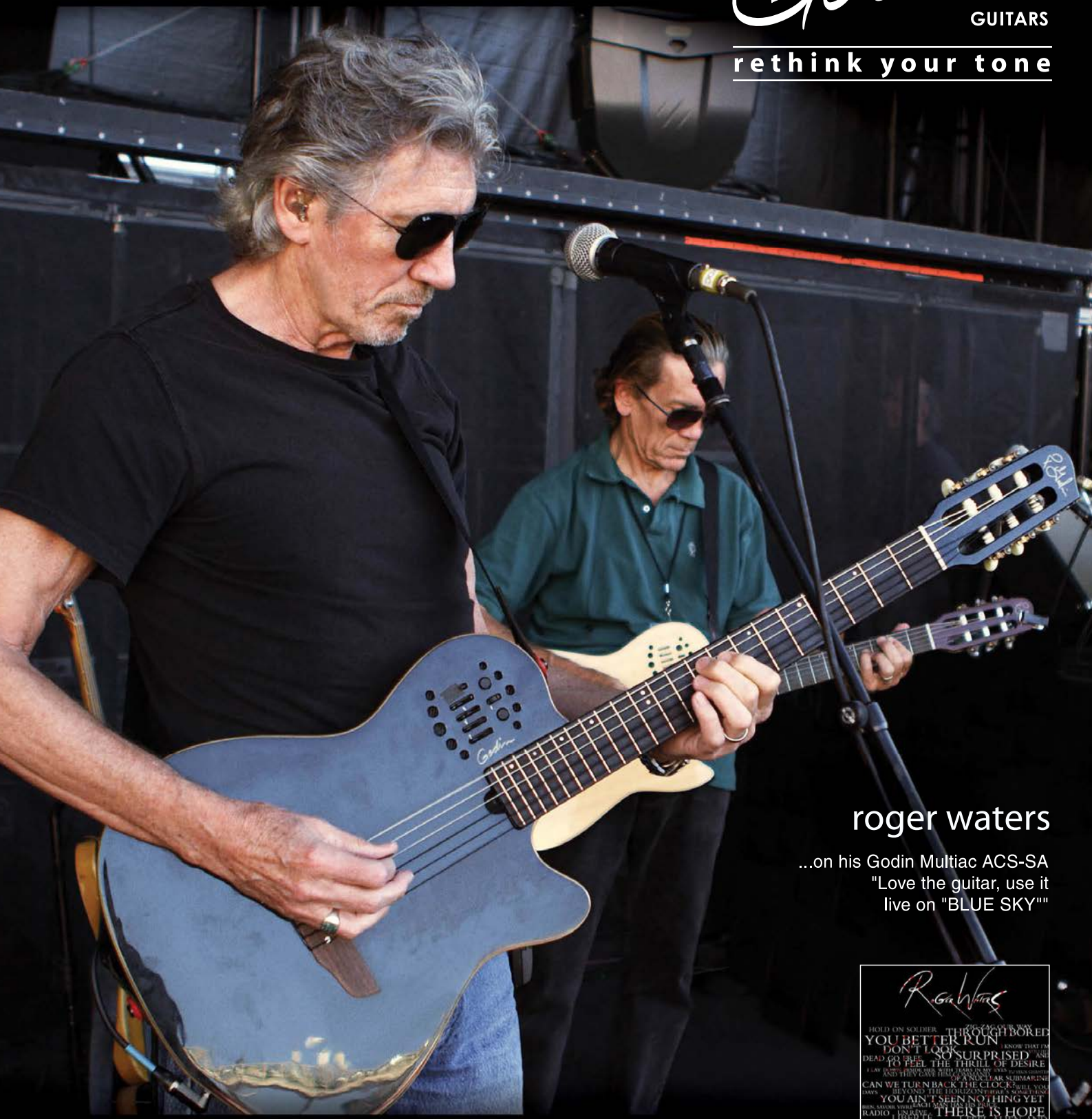

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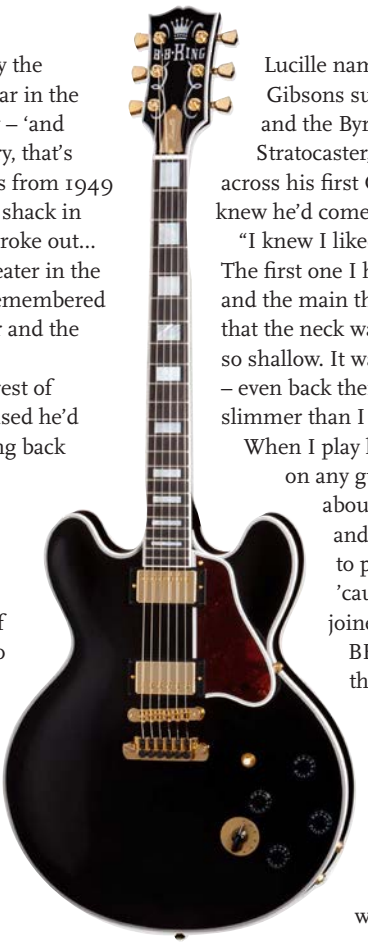
Photo: Kevin Westenberg

Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

BB King's Gibson Lucille signature

The cherished blues legend, now sadly departed, told us about the origins of one of the best known signature guitars on the planet – the famed 'Lucille' 355

Interview from **July 1996**



Lucille is arguably the best known guitar in the world. The story – 'and that ain't no story, that's the truth' – dates from 1949 when BB King was playing a shack in Twist, Arkansas and a fight broke out... "There was a big kerosene heater in the middle of the dance floor," remembered King. "That got knocked over and the whole place caught fire."

BB fled the joint with the rest of the crowd, but suddenly realised he'd left his guitar behind. Rushing back in, he managed to rescue his guitar before the whole place collapsed. Later on, King found out that the fight had taken place over a girl named Lucille and – aware of how close he himself came to perishing – named his f-hole Gibson after that woman to remind himself: "you can always get another guitar, but there's only one BB King."

Over the years, a number of King's Instruments carried the Lucille name – including deep-bodied Gibsons such as the Super 400 and the Byrdland and even a Fender Stratocaster, too – but when BB came across his first Gibson ES-335 in 1958 he knew he'd come home.

"I knew I liked the guitar straight away. The first one I had was a brown sunburst, and the main thing about that guitar was that the neck was so thin and the body so shallow. It was so comfortable to play – even back then when I was somewhat slimmer than I am now!"

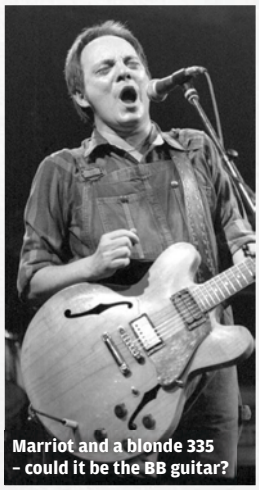
When I play low down (near to the nut) on any guitar there's something about the tone that I can't hear, and with the 335 it was so easy to play high up on the neck 'cause of the way the neck joined the body."

BB's first 335 was stolen from the boot of his car, one of a string of casualties: "But the worst one was when I'd been playing in a club and I was so tired that after I drove home I pulled up outside my apartment, shut my engine off and went to sleep 'cause I was >

too tired to go up to my room. One night, I'm asleep on the front seat and I don't know it, but the car door is open in the back and all of a sudden I hear the guitar strings brushing – I wake up and there's this guy taking the guitar out the back. The guy outran me so I threw a brick at him... and he did a flip but kept on running. That's the worst way I lost a guitar. The way it woke me up, I guess Lucille was saying, 'Hey, he's taking me!'"

BB used the stereo Gibson 355 for many years, which has a separate output for each pickup and the Vari-tone switch: "I call it the magic switch – I have it in the centre, which means both pickups are working but I control each of them separately without even touching the toggle switch – I adjust the volumes for both the pickups constantly."

Later on, Gibson developed the BB King Lucille signature, based on his original 355, but with a sealed body to help cut down on feedback. It's been available as a hugely successful Gibson model since 1980, and also, from 1996, as part of the budget-conscious Epiphone brand.

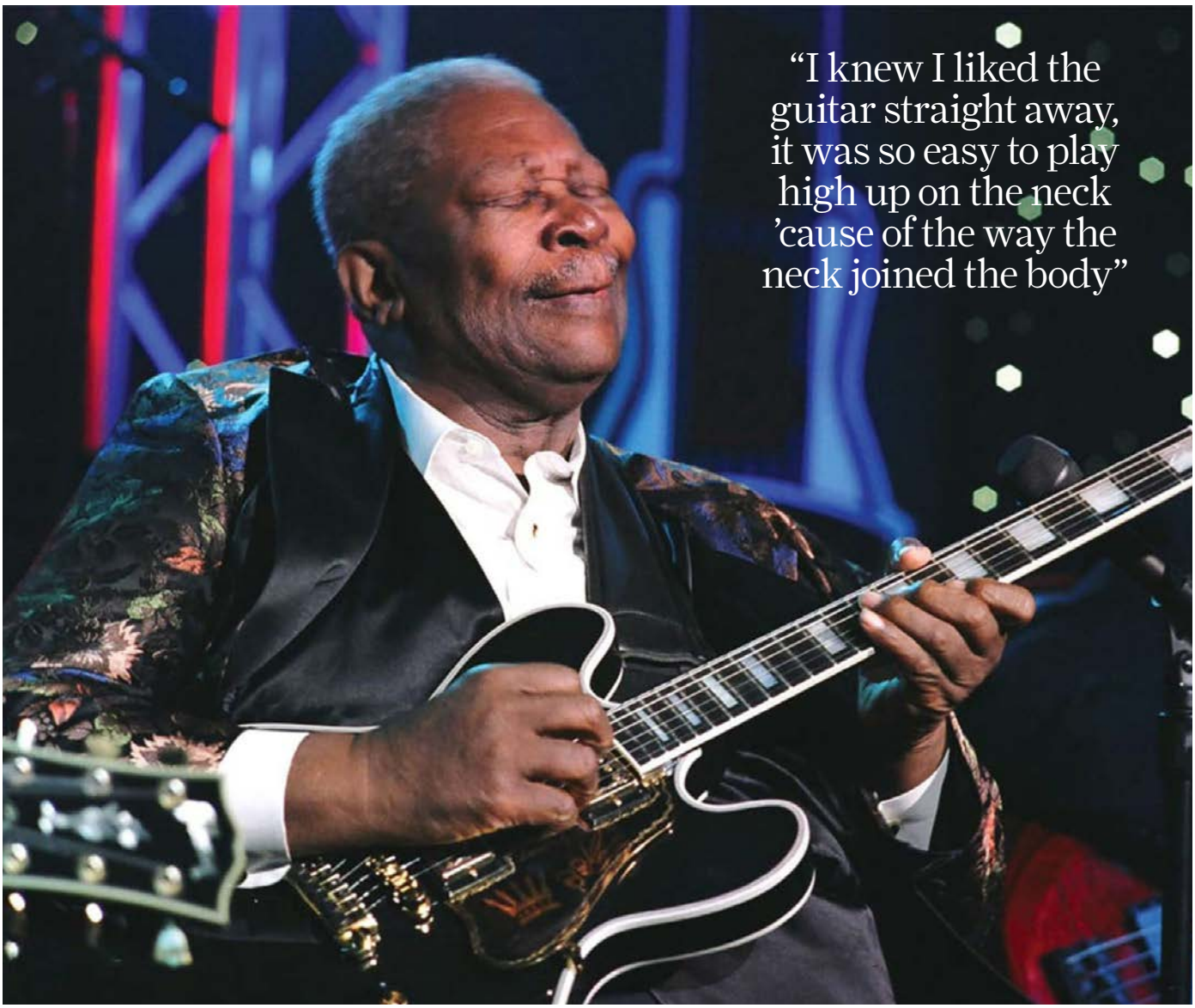


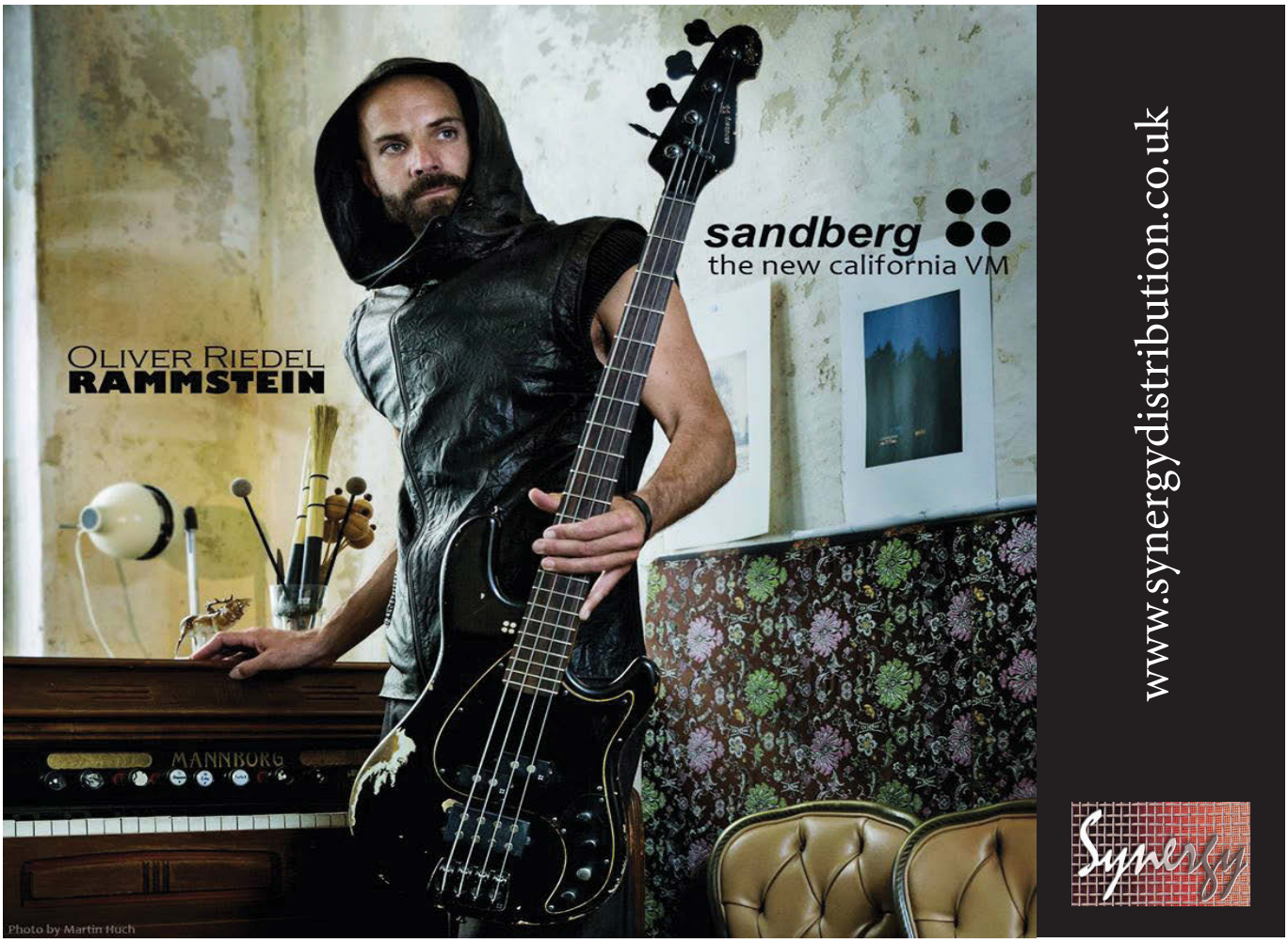
Marriot and a blonde 335 – could it be the BB guitar?

STEVE MARRIOT'S LUCILLE

When The Small Faces' Steve Marriot was offered an endorsement deal by Gibson during the 70s he apparently, unwittingly made off with a custom 335 built specially for BB King. The story goes that invited to take his pick from a whole rack of semis, Marriot duly chose a gorgeous-looking blonde 335, signed for it and waltzed out. Back in England, he and his guitar tech had just plugged the 335 in and discovered it to be the most mind-bogglingly sensational-sounding semi of all time when the phone rang. At the other end was a frantic Gibson employee pleading for the return of the instrument, which had apparently been built for BB and contained some unique pickup modifications. Would Steve be so kind as to pop it in the mail? "Bollocks," Marriot replied. The BB guitar reputedly escaped the conflagration that took Marriot's life and is now in the hands of an unknown friend.

Photo: Frans Schellekens/Getty

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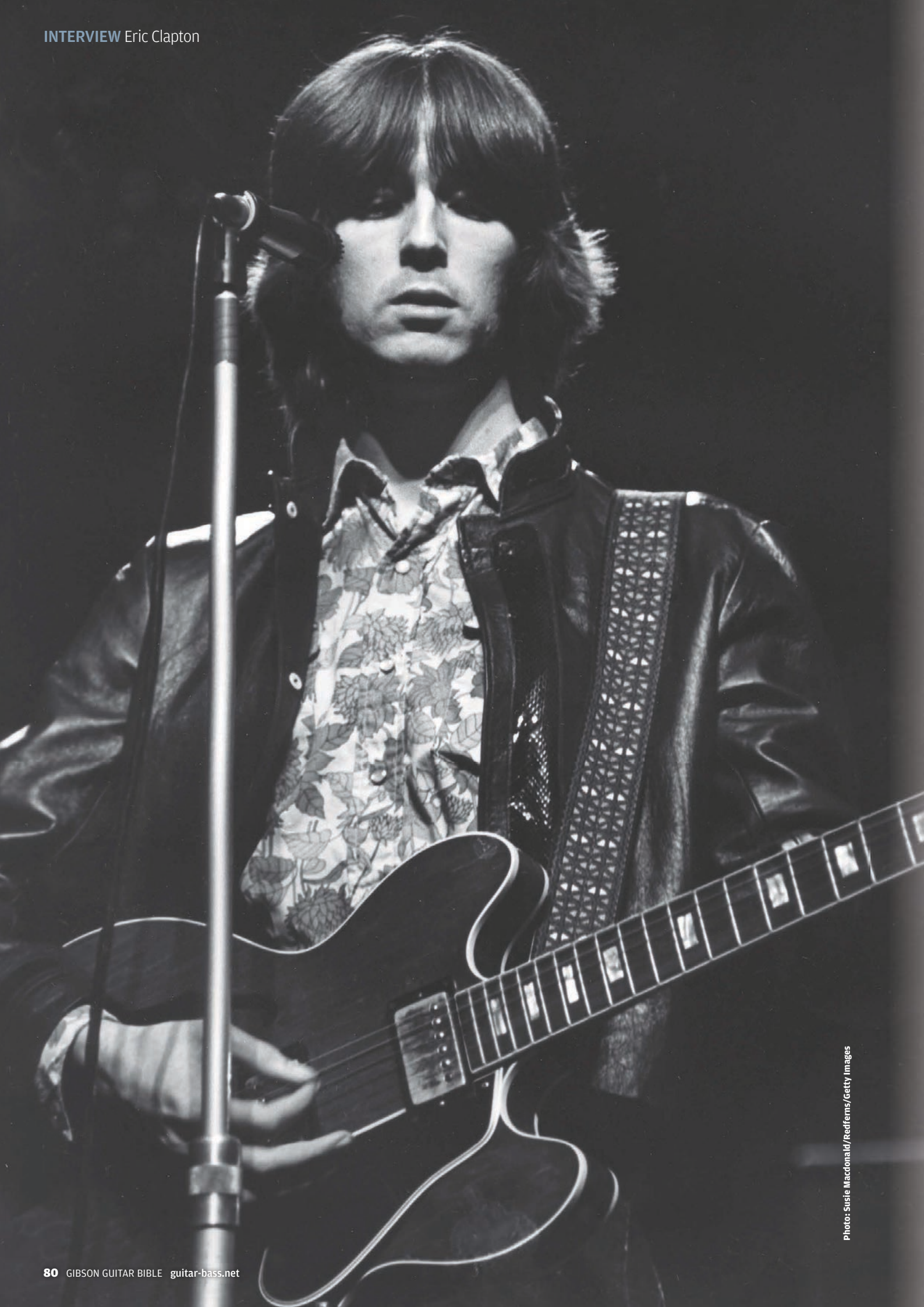


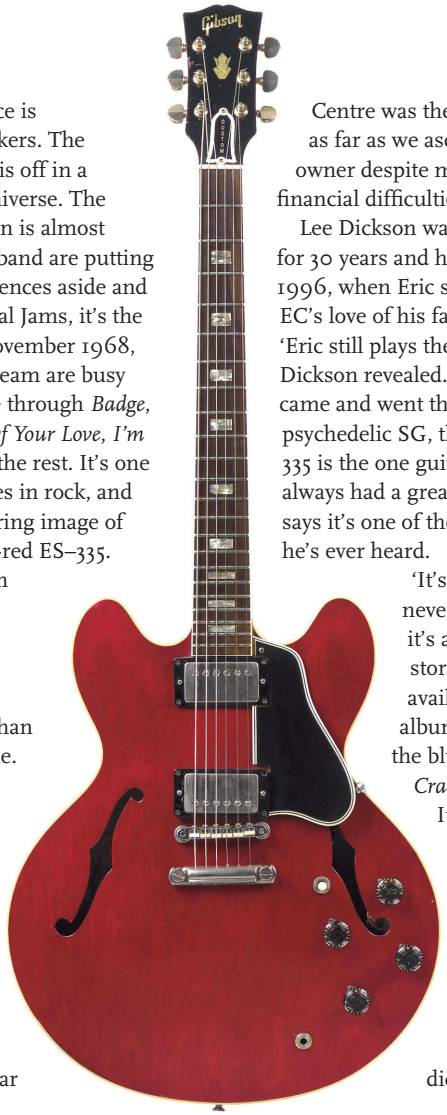
Photo: Susie Macdonald/Redferns/Getty Images

Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

Eric Clapton's 1964 Gibson ES-335

Not always spot-welded to Stratocasters, slowhand famously wielded his cherry red 335 at Cream's 1968 Royal Albert Hall farewell concert and he's been seen sporting a 1960 sunburst 335 in recent years too.

Interview from **July 1996**



The audience is going bonkers. The drummer is off in a parallel universe. The cameraman is almost certainly on drugs. The band are putting their considerable differences aside and kicking out the proverbial Jams, it's the Royal Albert Hall, 26 November 1968, and Eric Clapton and Cream are busy slicing a farewell swathe through *Badge*, *White Room*, *Sunshine Of Your Love*, *I'm So Glad*, *Crossroads* and the rest. It's one of those enduring images in rock, and certainly the most enduring image of Gibson's famous cherry-red ES–335.

Bought secondhand in London the 1964 cherry ES-335 was in Clapton's possession longer than any other guitar – from 1964 to 2004 – longer than either Blackie or Brownie. The 335 was eventually sold at auction for a staggering $847,500 to raise funds for EC's cherished 'Crossroads' drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre project in Antigua. The huge US instrument retailer Guitar Centre was the highest bidder and, as far as we ascertain, still the proud owner despite much publicised recent financial difficulties.

Lee Dickson was Clapton's guitar tech for 30 years and he spoke to us back in 1996, when Eric still owned the 335, about EC's love of his favourite semi-acoustic. 'Eric still plays the cherry red '64 a lot,' Dickson revealed. 'So many of his guitars came and went through the years – the psychedelic SG, the Les Pauls – but the 335 is the one guitar that he's kept. He's always had a great affinity with it, and says it's one of the best-sounding 335s he's ever heard.

'It's the one guitar that has never really been put away, it's always in and out of storage. It's certainly been available for just about every album he's recorded. It's on the blues album, *From The Cradle*, and *Journeyman*. It's a guitar he's often taken a notion to down the years, and when he started doing the blues events recently he began using it a lot more.

'When Eric bought it, the first thing he did was to change the >

machine-heads to Grovers. Apart from that it's all original, as far as I know, including the pickups. It was set up with .010" gauge strings and a normal action, nothing outrageous. "Ninety per cent of the time that Eric's playing a 335 he'll plug it straight in to a Twin, an old '58 tweed Twin. No effects, just the guitar and the amp. We've even given up wireless to try to be as authentic to the music and the individual songs as possible – just the old cords on the old amps with the original guitars. It does mean we used an incredible amount of guitars onstage for the blues things: L5s, open-tuned 12-strings, acoustics, gut-strings, Byrdlands, slide Byrdlands, Dobros, slide Strats. But Eric is very keen to try to emulate each sound as closely as possible, so with the 335 it's just the old Twin and that's it. The only box it goes through is a little thing with an A/ B switch to a spare amp and a mute switch so there's no crackles and pops when we change guitars."

Around the time the Cherry 335 was sold EC owned two other 335s. Most recently acquired was a collector's dream of a '59 dot neck in the rare blonde finish which Eric hadn't quite taken to. It was carried on the 1996 Blues Tour as a third spare, and the only person who played it was Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown.

> "Eric always had a great affinity with the cherry red '64, he says it's one of the best-sounding 335s he's ever heard"
>
> LEE DICKSON

Number two was a sunburst dot-neck from 1960, which we believe is the one still in his possession that's served for live duties since the sale of his prized Cherry 335. "That's an amazing guitar," Lee told us. "It's utterly, utterly different to the red '64, though – much thicker sounding, there's this silky kind of warmth to it... but the red '64 is still how a 335 should sound, to me.

"I couldn't really say how a 335 affects the way that Eric plays. The thing with him is that it's in his hands. If he was playing an Ibanez copy or a Yamaha copy, it would still sound great. You can't nail down what difference the guitar makes or how he reacts to a certain response or a certain feel – once the guitar's round his neck and it's plugged in then he's gone, he's lost in it, he's not a technical-thinking player in that way at all. It all takes place on a different level.

"All you can say for sure about Eric and the 335 is that's definitely one of his most favourite guitars, especially for the purer blues things. He could play any guitar he wanted, but to him the 335 is an original, no matter how many times it gets copied."

Clapton's 1960 dot-neck 335 now covers semi-hollow live duties

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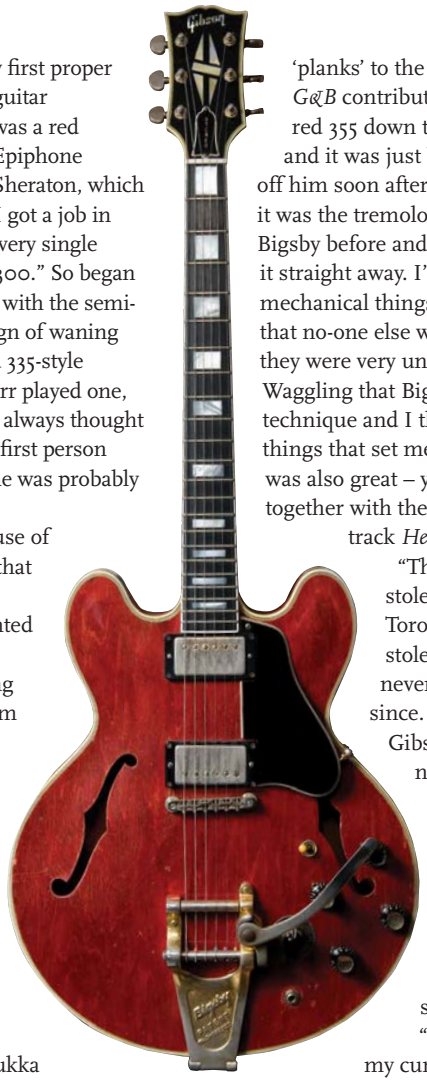
Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

Bernard Butler's 1961 Gibson ES-355

The ex-Suede wonderkid turned producer is a proud owner of a rather plush 1961 ES-355 and a recording studio christened Studio 335. It would appear he's a fan

Interview from **February 2015**



"My first proper guitar was a red Epiphone Sheraton, which I got when I was about 15. I got a job in Sainsbury's and saved up every single penny... it cost me about £300." So began Bernard Butler's love affair with the semi-acoustic and it shows no sign of waning any time soon. "I just loved 335-style guitars visually; Johnny Marr played one, plus Chuck Berry, who I've always thought was really cool, though the first person I remember seeing with one was probably Dave Edmunds.

"I also wanted one because of the richer sound. Around that time, 1986 or so, everyone was using Strats and I wanted something that was a lot richer sounding, something with a big and warm bottom end, but without being too jazzy. I had that Epiphone when I joined Suede, though it got stolen not long after.

"After that I got an '89 Les Paul, but as soon as Suede started recording the first album I just decided I wanted a real 335. Then Phil Harris (purveyor of pukka 'planks' to the stars and esteemed *G&B* contributer) brought this cherry red 355 down to the studios one day and it was just beautiful. I bought one off him soon after. The best thing about it was the tremolo – I'd never used a Bigsby before and I just fell in love with it straight away. I'm a big fan of crude mechanical things, plus I was very aware that no-one else was really using one as they were very unfashionable at the time. Waggling that Bigsby became part of my technique and I think that was one of the things that set me apart. The feedback was also great – you can hear that together with the Bigsby on the Suede track *He's Dead*.

"Then that guitar got stolen. Suede were in Toronto and it just got stolen off the coach – I've never left a guitar on a bus since. Around the same time, Gibson wanted to use my name in ads and do an endorsement deal. I wasn't really too bothered, but when my guitar was stolen I rang them and said, 'if you find me a really nice cherry red 355, I'll sign anything!'

"The one they got me, my current 355, is actually >

Photo: James Cumpsty

Butler's 355, essentially a higher spec'd 335, comes equipped with Bigsby and Vari-tone control

a much nicer guitar than the first one. I think that had a neck from a different year stuck on; this is an all original '61. It's got a really, really rich sound and the pickups are so loud. I play guitar in quite a raucous, bluesy way and others I've played are a bit more jazzy, which I don't find too appealing. It's the first guitar I pick up when I'm recording, even writing – just that and my Vox AC30 and I'm happy. I haven't got millions of guitars – I only have as many as I really need – and I've just found that the 355 can do most things. I like the muddiness of it, it's part of my sound, but I also think they're pretty versatile. One of the best things I've recorded was the track *Tonight* (on *The Sound Of McAlmont And Butler*) – that guitar intro is in fact my 355, just unplugged with a microphone over the f-hole. It sounds really dobro-ish and it's one of my favourite sounds.

"I do use the Vari-tone switch, though not often. Sometimes it just sounds like you're turning the guitar volume down, but positions 2 and 3 can occasionally be useful. You lose a lot of sustain on those settings and it kind of sounds a bit like a Fender Jaguar to me.

"It cost me about $4,500, but I get the feeling it's worth even more now, with the vintage market going the way it is. Anyway, I think that's a bit of a bargain as I've had so much use out of it. On a scale of one to 10? Oh, It's a 12, easy! It sounds great and it looks just brilliant. Sometimes guitars just don't look good on you, and this one does... doesn't it?"

> "On a scale of one to 10? Oh, it's a 12, easy! It sounds great and it looks brilliant. I use this guitar every day and have done since I bought it in 1993"

These days, Bernard's studio is a treasure trove of wonderful guitars, including a 1961 custom Black Gibson ES-330, a 1967 ex-Johnny Marr 12-string Gibson ES-335 and a 1981 Gibson Heritage, but his ES-355 is still his main instrument. "That guitar's my taxi," he jokes. "If you're a taxi driver you don't sit there thinking how vintage your taxi is – you just get in every day, and it does the job. If I wanted to buy one of these now I couldn't, because it costs too much. It's a beautiful guitar that I know people lust after. I use this guitar every day, and I have done since I bought it in 1993.'

Butler in 2015 with his 'go-to' guitar at Studio 335

Photos: Mike Prior

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

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Alvin with his modified 'Big Red' ES-335. On the far page is the Alvin Lee signature Gibson

Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

Alvin Lee's 'Big Red' Gibson 1959 ES-335

Venerated blues-rocker and Ten Years After overlord. TYA's 11-minute 335-fuelled workout *I'm Going Home* was one of the highlights of Woodstock. Alvin sadly passed away in 2013

Interview From **July 1996**

Alvin Lee's famous, modified cherry red 335 – dubbed 'Big Red' – was his one and only stage guitar for decades until Gibson kindly issued a signature reproduction in 2005 (pictured inset). He played the signature model on stage for the last eight years of his career, though of his original he often said: "Nothing else has ever come close".

Lee's 'Big Red' is a '59 model fitted with a later, 60s 'block inlay' neck, yet his unique sound was more likely due, in no small part, to the single-coil pickup installed between the familiar PAF humbuckers. 'Big Red' was consistently played through his trademark Marshall combo and it was a match made in heaven as far as the Ten Years After man was concerned, although, in true musicians style, he was constantly on the lookout for that elusive combination that might prove to be better.

"The 335 came from Chuck Berry, really, but I found that if you cranked the 355 up loud you just made it uncontrollable. The Les Paul was too heavy, while the Strat was too thin sounding. The way I play, my little finger sort of floats over the strings and below them. When I solo'd on a Strat I found I used to turn the volume down by accident till you couldn't hear me. I thought it was my amp or just my hearing that was going for a while.

"My 335's a 1959 that I bought for £45, including a case. Until recently I only used it with my Marshall 50W combo – the output of my guitar matched the input of the amp perfectly, and if you ever find a combination like that you have to stick with it. I avoid effects. I think the only one I really use is an Ibanez Tube Screamer in the studio for a little presence. I'm just a curly lead into the amp kinda bloke.

"I recently got into Marshall Jubilee heads. They're the only ones I've found that do the job as well as my 50W. I used to take it down there, 'cause I've known Jim Marshall a while and do comparisons. Finally one came up that I liked.

"My soloing has that jazz sensibility to it where I bring it down and then bring it up, return to the themes and stuff. My style comes from experimentation; the more you do it, the longer you can jam a solo, the more inventive you get."

Larry Carlton with his trusty 1968 ES-335. Right – his Gibson Signature guitar

Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

Larry Carlton's Gibson 1968 ES-335

Whether it's been as a solo performer or sessioneer to the stars, 'Mr 335' aka Larry Carlton has lit up the jazz skyline for over 35 years. "It's all become one statement now – my life and my music," he informs us .

Interview from **August 2007**

When the topic of session playing arises amongst guitar players, one name that's sure to be brought up is that of Larry Carlton. The former studio supremo with his trademark Gibson ES-335 was the undoubted king of the LA session scene between 1970 and 1977, playing up to 500 dates each year; it's the kind of schedule that would have killed the creativity of any ordinary mortal, yet during that period Carlton was also a fully paid-up member of jazz combo The Crusaders. The list of the people he's supplied guitar for reads like a Who's Who of the music industry: Joni Mitchell, Quincy Jones, Herb Alpert, John Lennon, Jerry Garcia, Steely Dan, and about a zillion more...

Ever since Larry Carlton quit the session scene, he has forged ahead with a successful solo career – but looking back to those heady studio days, he feels a strong sense of pride and achievement.

"Session work taught me how to make records, and it was great exposure,' he reflects. 'It also helped shape my playing – particularly the sessions I did for Joni Mitchell. We contributed so much to her songs. Joni had never recorded with a rhythm section before until Court And Spark, and to be associated with those great songs and have helped shape them for the world was great.

"I quit doing session dates in 1977. It wasn't exactly because I wanted a solo career... it was more that I was so busy for all those seven years that I couldn't charge any more money, and I couldn't take any more work. The session scene was already at the peak of what could be had, so I thought I could maybe get into producing records. So I started producing acts and playing live for fun – and somehow that turned into a solo career for me."

One constant by Carlton's side throughout his long and illustrious career has been his trusty Gibson ES-335.

"I've been playing the same guitar since I first bought it back in 1969," he admits. "I now have two. The one that I've played all these years is a '68, while the other one was actually given to me as a gift from a fan about three years ago. A gentleman in the northern part of the United States sent me an e-mail and told me about a guitar he had that was exactly like mine. >

Because it hadn't been played in 15 years and had belonged to his grandmother, he wanted to offer to give it to me. He basically said I would be the guy who he would want to have this guitar. So he sent it to me, and it's a wonderful instrument. I only take my one main guitar on the road."

In order to capture his sound in the studio, Carlton's method over the years has always begun with a simple mic in front of the amp. "I've had two extreme experiences when it comes to recording guitars in the studio," he details, "but it always starts with a basic microphone in front of the speaker. Depending on how that sounds, it goes from there."

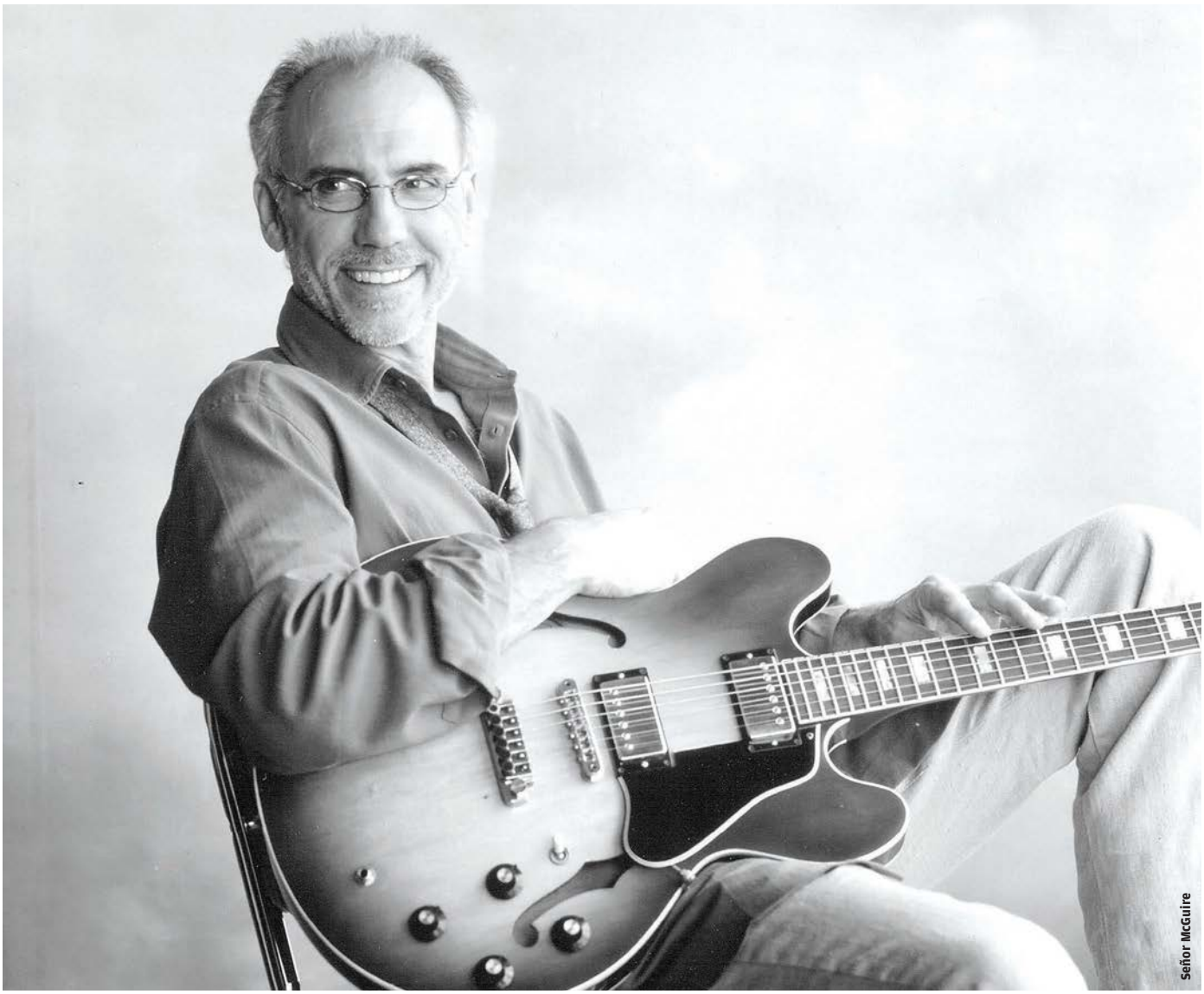
When it comes to recording, Carlton prefers to try to capture the spontaneous spirit of the moment rather than undertaking the laborious task of overdubbing – something that formed a big part of his early studio years. "For 90 per cent of the time, if not more now, my studio performance is captured on the session," he reveals. "It's just the way that it's come about over the years.

"On my earlier albums I would often overdub solos and parts. One example would be the session I did for Kid Charlemagne, where I did three or four takes. I played a few solos and finally got the one that I wanted. Then I picked it up again from the middle, and finished it – and that was it. But over the last 15 years, what you hear is what I got on that day."

> "I found that the 335 was as versatile in sound as I was in my playing. You couldn't do all those sounds with a Tele, or with a Les Paul"

So what does Carlton think has been the secret to his longevity and success in an industry noted for its fickleness and what part has his devotion to the 335 served? "I think it's all being versatile," he says, matter-of-factly. "I was definitely one of the first, if not the first guy from my generation who could play so many styles so well.

"When I first started doing recording dates, there were only two sorts of players doing sessions; the "legit" guitar players, who could read anything, and the rock-oriented and street-oriented guitar players who could only play one particular style and couldn't read any notes. I was the first guy to come onto the session scene that could read really well and who could play all kinds of styles. And that – the versatility that I have – has been my greatest blessing. I was getting calls for many different styles of music. I might have one session where it would be a film score that needed a nice, rich, clean guitar sound. Then there would be a country session or a pop date, or even maybe a commercial that needed a jazz sound. So, personally, I found that the 335 guitar was as versatile in sound as I was in my playing. You couldn't do all those sounds with a Tele, or with a Les Paul. The 335 seemed to be the guitar that best represented what I could do at different times when I was called upon."



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Guitar & Bass **INTERVIEW**

Joe Brown's 1960 Gibson ES-335

Best known as a lovable 'cockney geezer', Joe was also the first home-grown rock 'n' roll guitar hero and an early 335 devotee

Interview from **March 2013**

As a general rule, we like our guitar legends to be enigmatic, perhaps even mysterious, with just a touch of the other-worldly about them. As an archetypal 'cockney geezer', Joe Brown really doesn't fit the mould. Indeed, his unassuming, affable persona may even have diverted attention away from his huge contribution in shaping the sound of the British beat boom. Joe was the first true home-grown rock 'n' roll guitar hero, and fledgling guitarists in the late 50s – from George Harrison to Mark Knopfler – idolised him. A young Justin Hayward bought a Gibson ES-335 because it was the guitar Joe played.

Taking advantage of a Beatles support slot, Harrison sneaked into Joe's dressing room to have a photo taken with the great man's guitar.

Joe's stints backing American touring artists such as Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran showed his skills to be well ahead of his peers; it's fair to say Joe and Billy Fury were the British answer to leading US rock 'n' rollers Ricky Nelson and his acclaimed sideman James Burton. The guitar Brown laid down on Billy's Sound Of Fury album became the benchmark for UK six-string beat boomers across the land, and the LP is lauded as the first great British rock 'n' roll album to this day.

In the late 50s, Joe was often seen toting his white Grimshaw, but the British-built hollowbody was ousted as soon as the infamous American guitar embargo was lifted. "Grimshaw made some good instruments, but we didn't really know any better because before that it was just Hofners – we all had to have them because there wasn't any other decent guitar about. Poor old Bert Weedon did marvels with them. Some comedian said he's the only bloke who made a fortune out of a yard of German plywood!"

Joe's workhorse guitar was a Gibson ES-335 dot-neck, which he bought brand new.

"The Grimshaw only lasted until I got hold of a Gibson. I bought it in Selmer's on Charing Cross Road. As soon as they came over I was straight in, it was probably one of the first batch to come over. We were down there like rats out of an aqueduct!"

Later on, Joe hit on some hard times and ended up selling his precious Gibson ES-335 back to Selmer's, and it was quickly snapped up. "Roy Wood bought it. I know that Jeff Lynne and George Harrison both approached him to get it back as a present for me, but he won't sell it," he mourns. "I'd love to get my hands on it again, he said he's gonna leave it to me in his will... so I'm gonna nip around and put something in his milk! It would be a '59 or a '60 and the colour was brunette as opposed to the blond – it wasn't that brown that they use on the sunbursts, it was closer to black. The one I've got now has the same finish. I think it's a 1970, and I've had it for 30 or 40 years."

> I wish I still had my old Gibson, it was one of the first batch to come over. The bloody thing used to talk to me

Though a Gibson ES-345 remains his main squeeze, "it's rewired in mono, like a 335," Joe also has a Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster and an Alvin Lee signature. "Alvin himself gave it to me – it has different pickups on it to my other one. Alvin loaned me a dot-neck blonde 335 for a tour once, but when I found out it was worth 25 grand it became a bit of a liability! I wish I still had my old Gibson though... the bloody thing used to talk to me."

Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

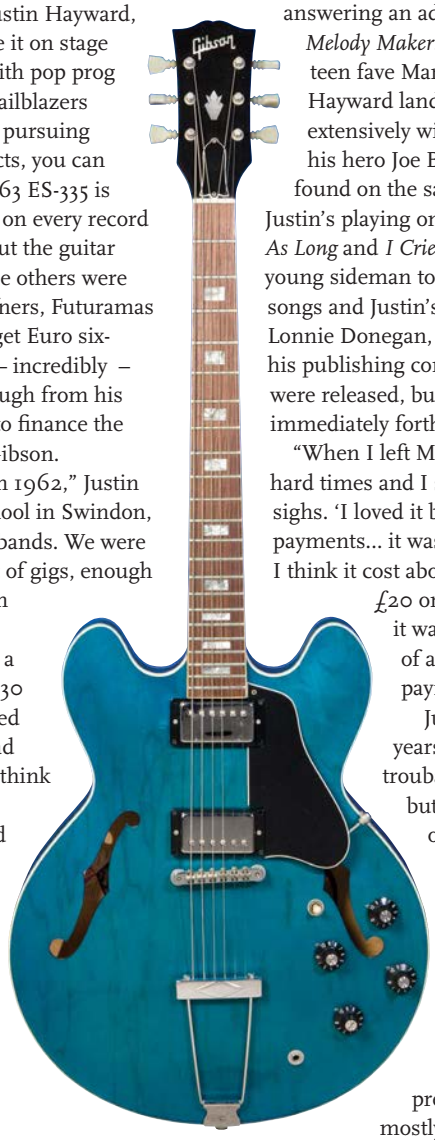
Justin Hayward's Gibson 1963 ES-335

From as young as 15 years old Justin Hayward has been a disciple of the ES-335. The Moody Blues frontman shares his story of life-long semi-devotion.

Interview from **May 2013**

Whenever you see Justin Hayward, be it on stage with pop prog trailblazers The Moody Blues or out pursuing his expansive solo projects, you can be sure his trusty red 1963 ES-335 is never far away. It's been on every record he's made since 1968, but the guitar wasn't his first 335. While others were still struggling with Hofners, Futuramas and any manner of budget Euro six-strings, at just 15 Justin – incredibly – was already earning enough from his prodigious guitar skills to finance the purchase of a genuine Gibson.

"This would have been 1962," Justin recalls. "I was still at school in Swindon, but I was in a couple of bands. We were getting a decent amount of gigs, enough to come up to London on the train, go to Maurice Placquet's shop and buy a decent guitar and an AC30 each. I knew that I wanted the 335. I even rang ahead to check they had one. I think it was new, a '62. It was red and had the standard stop tailpiece. There was the whole Chuck Berry connection, but it was all down to Joe Brown, really. His ES-335 was the one that I knew and kind of adored."



A couple of years later, with his 335 in his hand, Justin headed back up to London after answering an advert for a guitarist in *Melody Maker*. It turned out to be for teen fave Marty Wilde's band, and Hayward landed the job. He toured extensively with Wilde, befriending his hero Joe Brown who was often found on the same bill; you can hear Justin's playing on two Wilde singles, *Just As Long* and *I Cried*. Marty encouraged his young sideman to start writing his own songs and Justin's talent was spotted by Lonnie Donegan, who signed him up to his publishing company. Several singles were released, but alas, success wasn't immediately forthcoming.

"When I left Marty I was really on hard times and I sold the 335," Justin sighs. 'I loved it but I couldn't afford the payments... it was as simple as that. I think it cost about £160. You'd put down £20 or something and then it was a hire purchase kind of arrangement – you were paying forever."

Justin spent the next few years struggling as a solo troubadour on the folk circuit but by 1966 a demo of some of his songs found its way to Mike Pinder of The Moody Blues, who had just lost singer/guitarist Denny Laine. Pinder picked up the phone – and the rest is rock history.

The Moody Blues had previously been playing mostly blues-based covers >

Hayward cradles the ES-335 that's been with him for nearly 50 years. Inset left, one-off blue 335 presented to Justin by Gibson

but the band quickly embraced Justin's psychedelic folk leanings and recorded *Days Of Future Passed*, which spawned the Hayward-penned monster hit *Nights In White Satin*. It was a slow burner though, these poetic, proggy musings were a little before their time – it was not until a staggering five years later that the album peaked at #3 in the US – but it did well enough upon its release to cement Hayward's position.

Now, with a regular income, it was clearly time for the young guitarist to reignite his love affair with the 335. He first set eyes on his now famed 335 when he hired it in from Selmer's in London in 1967 during the tail-end of the sessions for the *In Search Of A Lost Chord* album. "I was still craving a 335 and I just fell in love with it. I didn't want to give it back. Well, they insisted as they were earning a fortune out of it as a rental guitar, and they sent a big heavy round to Decca studio No.1 to claim it. I went to the shop two or three times begging them to let me buy it! In the end I came to a deal with them. They said 'Listen, if you want it you're gonna have to pay the new price,' so I paid £168."

The guitar remains his main squeeze to this day, even though he did for a while own the holy grail of 335 lovers – a mint blond late 50s model. It could never oust his '63 and in the end the pangs of guilt that plagued his conscience about such a beautiful guitar never being played forced him to move it on. His '63 still turns up at every gig, although these days if conditions are too harsh at an outdoor show, a 1992 sunburst reissue stands in. It's quite possible that a signature model 335 could emerge at some point too.

"Gibson want to take my guitar and analyse it inside and out and then reconstruct another one from that. They have this kind of MRI scanner for guitars! They took me to the Custom Shop where they make the guitars look old. There's only two guys but they've got all sorts of tools for bashing and scraping guitars, odd kind of bits of wire and stuff... quite disturbing, but I love the way they look."

> This 335 will outlive us all. It's a sonic masterpiece... perfection! There's no reason why it shouldn't go on forever

In the 70s Gibson invited Justin to design his ultimate guitar, but the project wasn't a huge success. "I came up with a sort of solid version of the 335. When they proudly delivered it to me it weighed a ton... it was ridiculous. Not one of my better ideas! I perhaps should have gone and worked with them at the factory instead of doing it on the back of a fag packet. Unfortunately, it was broken in transit some years ago, but I've still got it and I'm not going to part with it."

Around the same time Gibson also crafted a one-off custom blue ES-335 for Justin and presented it to him on stage as a surprise. "They had heard the Blue Guitar single and The Moody Blues' artist Phil Travis had done this painting of a blue 335 for the sleeve. It was a fantastic gesture and it's a very decent guitar – exactly as you would expect a late-70s 335 to be. I used it as a spare for a while because I couldn't think what on earth to do with it. I always just reach for my 'real' 335, you see. The blue one just doesn't have anything that that one doesn't have.

Nothing could replace the '63 335. It's been a 48-year love affair that's never faltered. "It's on every Moodies record since 1967 and every solo record," Justin marvels. "I often look at that guitar when it's on its stand on stage and think, that's a sonic masterpiece... perfection!

"Guitars are works of art and that's why we want to own them. It's a tough guitar. There's no reason why it shouldn't go on forever... that 335 will outlive us all."

Justin on stage at the Albert Hall, London in 2004. His precious '63 335 still goes to every gig whether it be Moody Blues or solo shows

Photo: Brian Rasic/Getty Images

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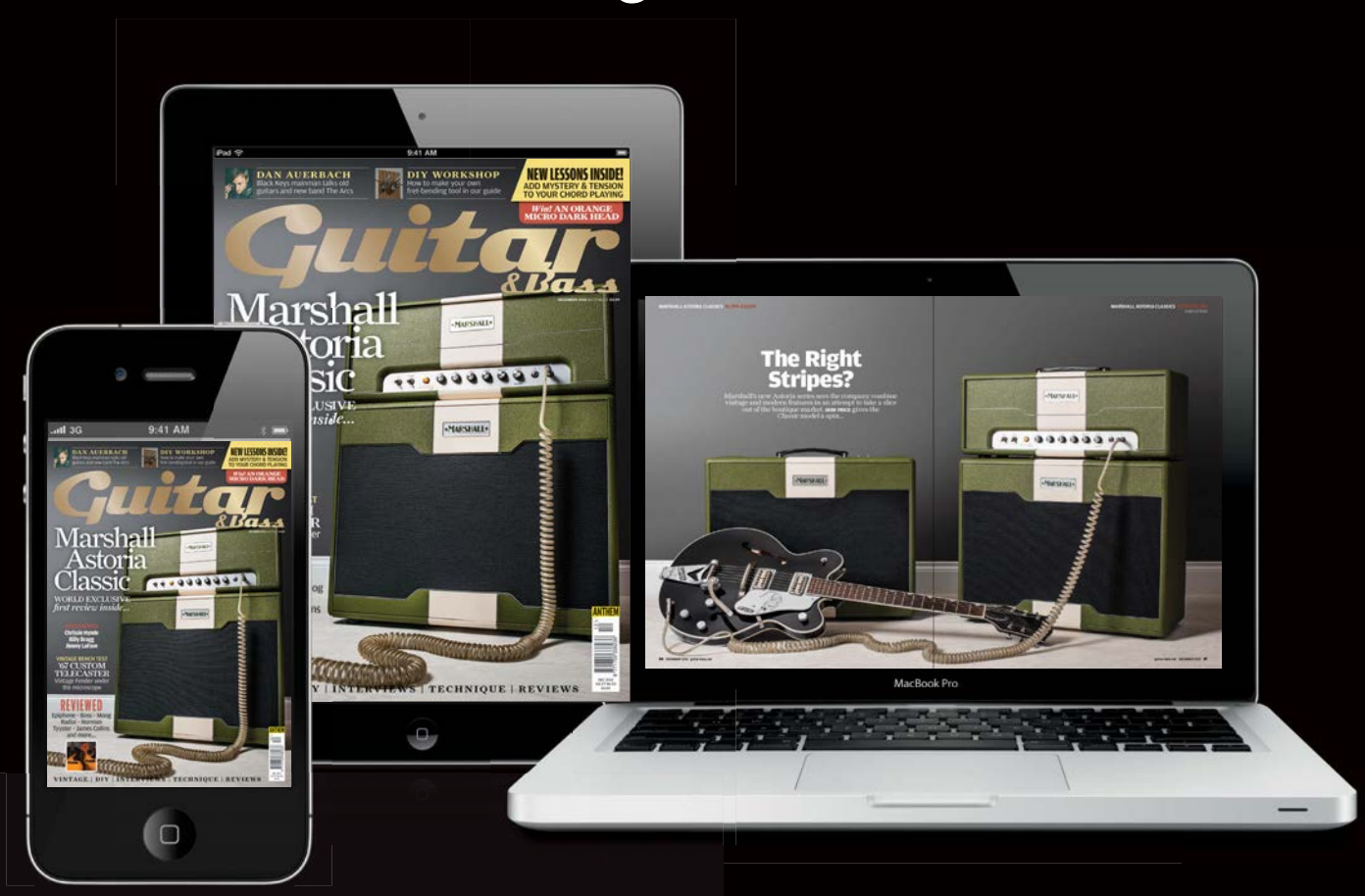

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Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

Johnny A's Gibson Signature

The future of the guitar instrumental is in good hands with Johnny A, who melds his love of pop with a uniquely jazzy, bluesy approach, all wrought from his personalised Gibson Hollowbody

Interview from **August 2014**

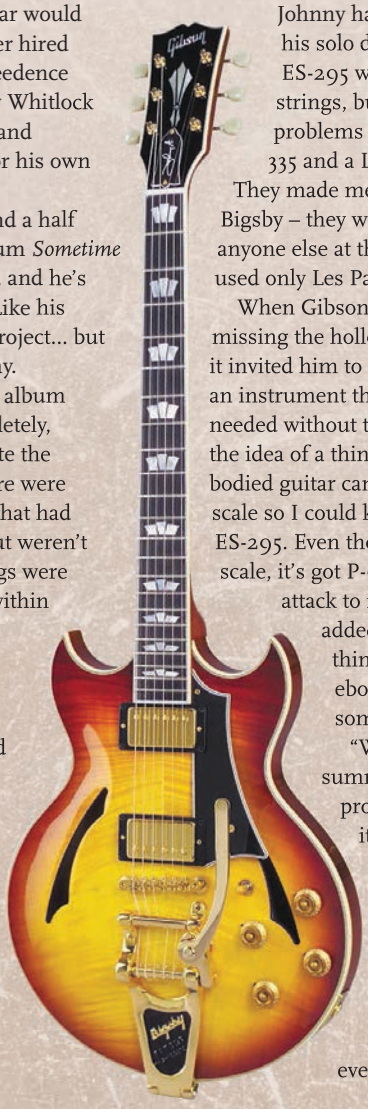
The current economic climate has seen a boom in the self-employed – but Johnny A took the decision to go it alone all of 15 years ago. At the same time, he decided to specialise in instrumental music, prompted by a bronchial infection that laid him low. The guitar would be his voice, and the former hired gun for Doug Clifford (Creedence Clearwater Revival), Bobby Whitlock (Derek and the Dominos) and others would be singing for his own supper from now on.

Fast forward a decade and a half from 1999, when first album *Sometime Tuesday Morning* appeared, and he's busily promoting *Driven*. Like his debut, it's a self-released project... but it's been made the hard way.

"I engineered the whole album completely, mixed it completely, played everything and wrote the songs," he confirms. "There were some fragments of songs that had been around for a while but weren't finished. All the other songs were conceived and massaged within the studio process without looking at a clock and without worrying about a chequebook.

"I could hear in my head how I wanted to shape this record. But it was important to me that the record didn't sound like one guy doing everything."

Back when Gibson proposed a Johnny A signature guitar, our man was understandably flattered. "I was never arrogant enough to think anyone would name a guitar after me – especially Gibson. I'd been endorsed by them for seven years and was totally stoked." It's turned out to be their second best-selling signature model, possibly because it has never been out of production since 2002.



Johnny had recorded 70 per cent of his solo debut album with a Gibson ES-295 with vibrato and flatwound strings, but suffered feedback problems live. "I started using my 335 and a Les Paul, both with Bigsbys. They made me a '59 Les Paul with a Bigsby – they weren't making them for anyone else at the time. I got three and used only Les Pauls live."

When Gibson heard Johnny was missing the hollow tone of the jazz guitar, it invited him to come up with ideas for an instrument that gave him the sound he needed without the hassle. "So that's where the idea of a thinline, completely hollow-bodied guitar came in – but with a 25.5" scale so I could keep the snappiness of the ES-295. Even though the 295 has a 24.75" scale, it's got P-90s; it has a percussive attack to it which I was missing. We added a longer-scale neck to the thinline body and also added ebony to the neck to give it some more spank.

"We started talking in summer 2002, I used the prototypes on *Get Inside* and it came out at NAMM 2003. So it was a year from scratching it on a piece of paper to it coming to market – an amazingly quick turnaround.

"I still love it and play it every day – it does everything I need it to do."

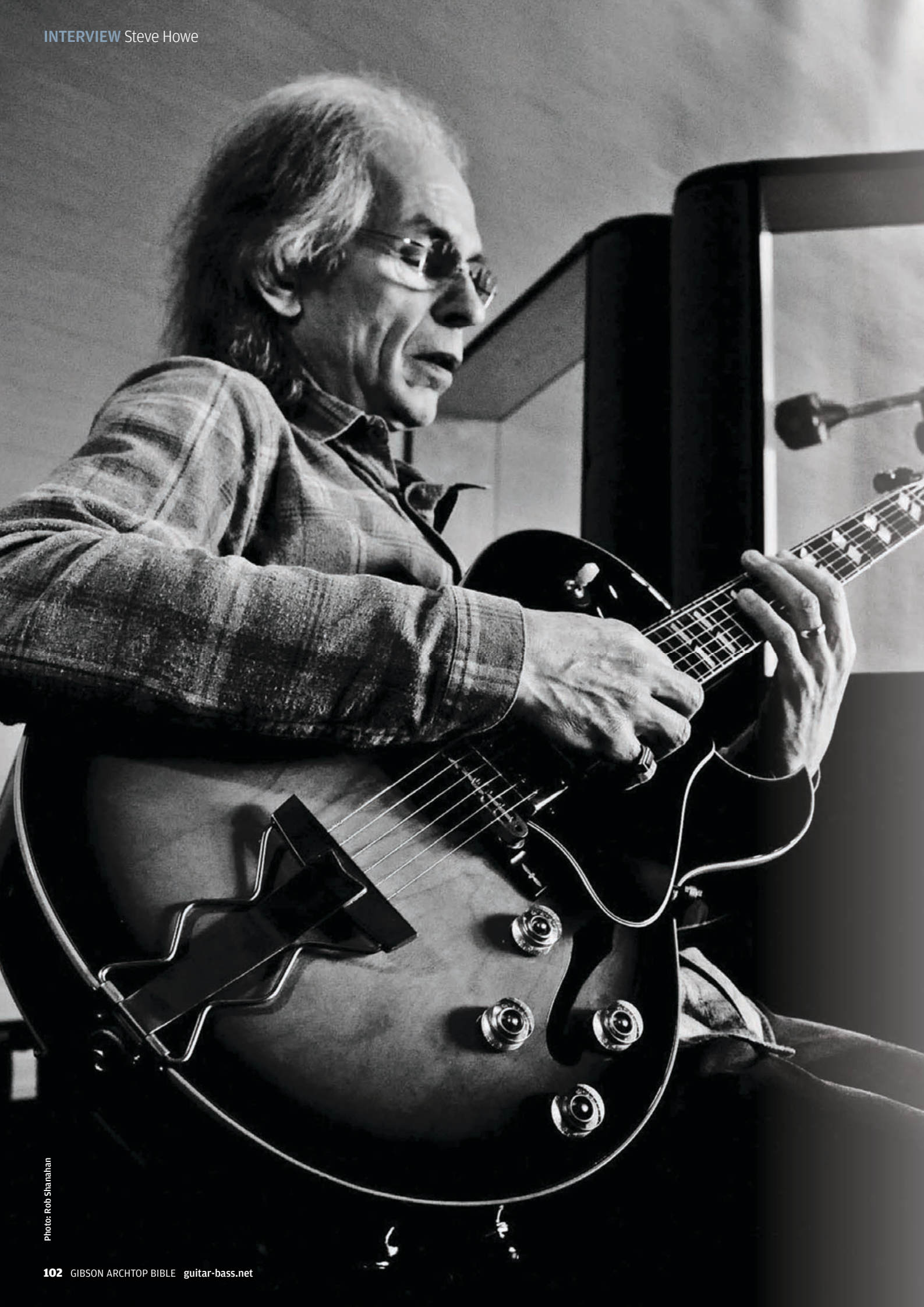


Photo: Rob Shanahan

Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

Steve Howe's Gibson ES-175D

Lars Mullen sets off down the muddy lanes and into the deepest depths of Devon to meet Steve Howe. His reward? The opportunity to get his paws on one of the world's great guitars – just one of the truly beautiful instruments in Howe's possession...

Interview from **May 2004**

Guitar players – we all have a passion within a passion. We all love to play and we all treasure the instruments we collect. For Steve Howe, his beloved Gibson ES-175D is the business. It's still number one after over 50 years. "Even before I owned an archtop, when I was flipping through my early collection of Gibson catalogues it felt so natural for some strange reason to have a guitar that wasn't solid," says Howe.

"This was at a time when archtops weren't associated with the current trend of popular music. For me, the sheer beauty was really most endearing; it just said something to me, and the fact that musicians like Wes Montgomery and Herb Ellis were current users indicated that this had to be a good model. I set my heart on a Gibson ES-175D and ordered it from Selmers, Charing Cross Road, London in October 1964. I had to wait a painful four weeks for delivery.

"It's all very strange really, I was certainly influenced by jazz musicians, Kenny Burrell for one, but if I'd come out sounding like him, I'd never have got a job in a pop band, which is what I wanted. When I walked in and put the back pickup on, nobody said, "That sounds like a jazz guitar". I was getting a particular type of tone – I didn't know at the time but that would ultimately contribute to the Steve Howe sound."

So sincere is Howe's relationship with his ES-175D that any form of transport without air suspension, or indeed the sheer mention of an aeroplane hold, has the legendary Yes guitarist wincing – although measures are taken against unforeseen mishaps.

"I've learnt from a bad experience – now I allow myself the extravagance of buying a separate plane seat, so it doesn't leave my side. Only the ES-175D gets this treatment," explains Howe.

With constant TLC and habitual cleaning, the legendary ES-175D looks today like it might have spent what's fast approaching 50 years in a glass cabinet, rather than circling the globe.

"I've kept the finish in as near perfect condition as one would expect for its age, although I've stopped using polish, as the layers were building up. I take around 10 guitars on tour, so my guitar technicians are really busy. I've now got guitar techs that I can trust with my ES-175. They know >

the ES is super special to me and take super, super care – although rules still apply. I'm not in favour of all the strings coming off at once; one at a time for me, to ensure the neck tension remains more or less permanently settled, it's only been in the last few years that I've trusted anyone in this field."

A close inspection of the guitar is a risk a journalist undertakes at their own peril. However, even from a safe distance, it's noticeably obvious that fret dressing is high on Steve Howe's list of priorities.

"That's right. It's beyond most people's belief, even at Gibson, that anyone could have a working guitar this long without having it re-fretted. For me, this fact contributes to the guitar's immense charm – the way it feels and plays, it's so rewarding to play, I can excel on it, and it's a launchpad for ideas. Martin Taylor played it and he couldn't believe how beautiful it is to play. I do use a fairly heavy string gauge: .012, .014, .016, .026, .042, .054. This is a risk to the frets, but I'm not a vibrato fanatic, which I think is partly responsible for fret wear. The fact that I'm a light, even player covering most of the fretboard, not just one area, certainly helps."

As one would expect, to maintain the original appearance the guitar's hardware is pretty much stock, but what of that out-sized pickup selector switch? "I just found the original plastic switch top too small. I'd already replaced the tuners with Grovers and had this idea of filing down one of the buttons into a sort of oblong shape, for an extra large selector, its bigger and spongier, and without doubt sped up my pickup changes, I got remarkably quick. The only other changes are a deluxe ebony bridge base on the Tune-O-Matic bridge and speed knobs for easy handling – and the ability to actually see what value they are on. I'm amazed how some manufactures can just bring out knobs with no way of knowing where you are, like some of the Fender range, a Tele for example," he quips.

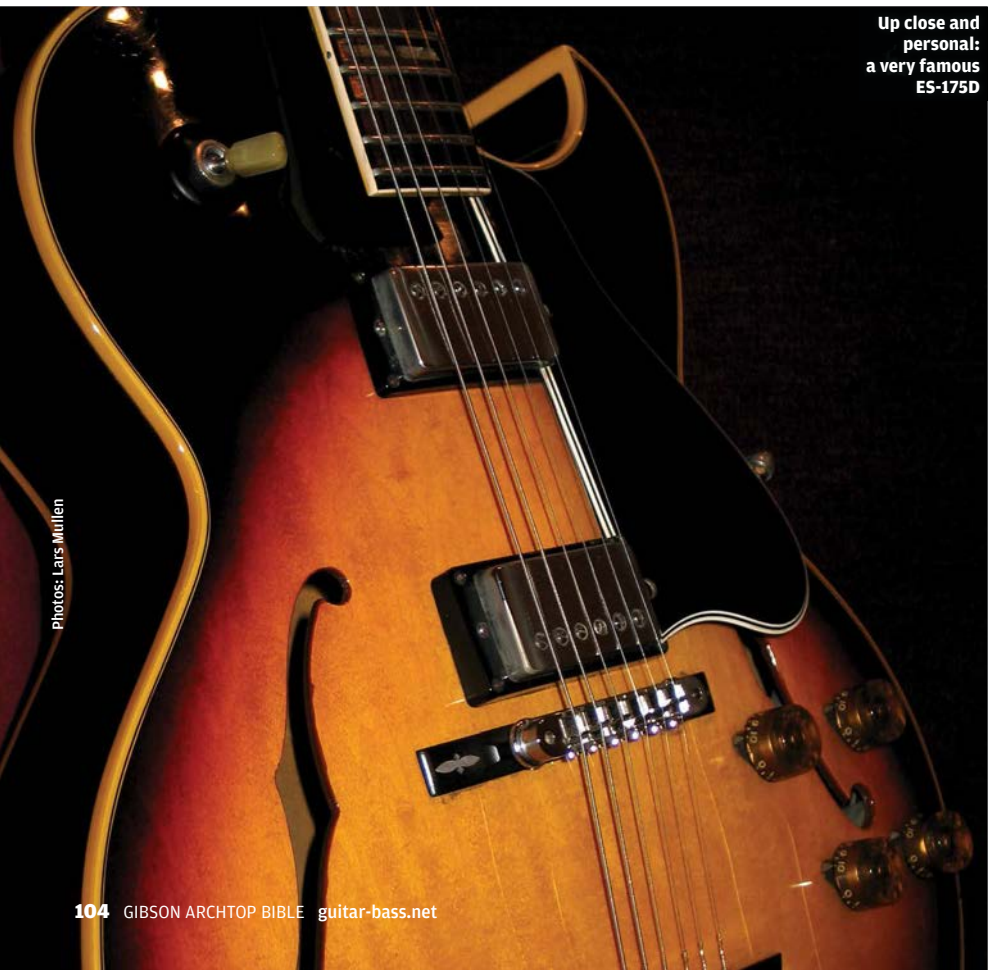
> "I've now got guitar techs that I can trust with my ES-175D. They know the ES is super special to me and take super, super care"

Howe's popularity and reputation as a guitar player led Gibson to launch the Steve Howe ES-175D signature model. But how does it compare to his own '64?

"They did a great job at Gibson, it was a long haul through several modifications getting it back to the '64 look, but they rose to the occasion. It looks and sounds very authentic. I was really pleased with the result. I take one on long haul gigs, say Australia or Japan, possibly in place of the original. The choice is then made, because if I have the original at hand then it's gonna be that one every time. But that's just me; you see, my '64 has been primed and stylised through me and there won't be many other guitars made before '64 that will sound like this. However, on stage I have a lot of techniques where I mix in an E-Bow, and I have this taboo with the original and won't use it on the pickups, so I use the signature model instead. There was this one guy in Japan who deserved a medal because he actually spotted it was the signature model even though it had been modified with some '64 parts."

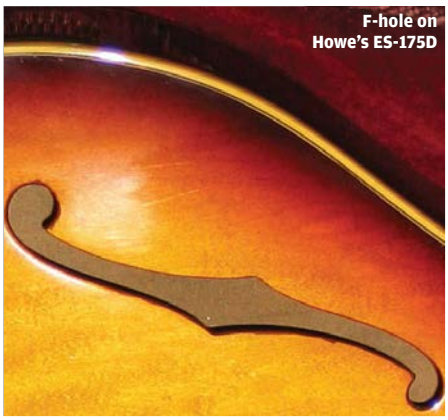
For all his fondness of his personal ES-175, Howe is well known for his extensive instrument collection. It's so big that it needed a book to catalogue it completely (*The Steve Howe Guitar Collection*, published by Balafon). We now face the dilemma of how to do the collection justice within the confines of a magazine. The solution? We ask the Yes guitarist to select some personal favourites and give us the tour.

"It had been a dream to own the acoustic version of the ES, and in the mid-70s I bought privately this beautiful L4C. One of the interesting things is the fact it has a hand-carved top inside, helping the response. I've tried this guitar strung in different ways with the heavy flatwound jazz approach, but I do prefer the ES-175D set-up. I mainly use this one for practising. Not a lot of writing is done on it, but I'm so pleased to have this as



Up close and personal: a very famous ES-175D

Photos: Lars Mullen



F-hole on Howe's ES-175D

The ES-175D's Trapeze tailpiece

a brother to the ES-175. This ES-345 Stereo is one that Gibson presented to me in 1970 for advertising their strings, I'd always wanted a Stereo or 335, and when I plugged it into two amps, that was it. I was just at home. With the true Stereo properly in phase, and you're standing in the right position, oh! Beautiful.

"The whole of Topographic Oceans side one is all on this model. You can hear, especially through headphones, that I'm panning like mad with the pedals. I found this guitar was such an advancement from the ES, and as the fingerboard was flatter I could use it for some high-speed steering. No way was I going off the rails – with the extra frets I was in heaven. It was built to be a smooth and exciting guitar to play. Gibson very kindly customised a Byrdland tailpiece inscribed with ES-345, to me this just completed it."

Here in Howe's main studio, by no means a modern building, the atmosphere is extremely relaxing and very creative, and one can relate to the inspirational writing of many of his projects. There are so many old guitar cases stacked in racks, with stories locked inside.

"Guitars need to be flexible towards temperature," explains Howe. "However, the studio is kept around 65 degrees – not too hot to cause warping or damage. I used to look at humidity a little closer, but now I look at the guitars and they tell me how they feel! The Gibson FD-H (Francis, Day and Hunter), I bought for a mere £50, again from Selmers, six months after the ES, I love this guitar – it's a very close second favourite. The >

Howe replaced the 175's selector switch as he found the original too small

'For me, the sheer beauty of the ES-175D was really most endearing, and the fact that musicians like Wes Montgomery were users indicated that this had to be a good model.'

> "There have been times when the actual smell of a guitar in a case has been the deciding vote on the sale."

body is four inches deep, with unusual black/white/black chequered binding. Although I had the neck slightly shaved down, it originally had the chunky pointed shape that was popular in its day when it was built in the late 30s/early 40s, It's worn well. However, the original inlays were rotten so we had to replace them with blocks. This is a really inspirational guitar, and parts of *Close To The Edge* were conceived here.

"The f-holes are beautiful, I wish Gibson would look at the f-hole design as a trademark because they are so beautifully sculptured, like the L4C, small and very finely cut – and that headstock, oh! Magnificent. It has a really unusual neck, small and refined, with a big body. We fitted a Charlie Christian pickup and controls, but I just felt it was crying out to be restored to its original state, hence you can still see the circular control patches that Gibson didn't completely disguise.

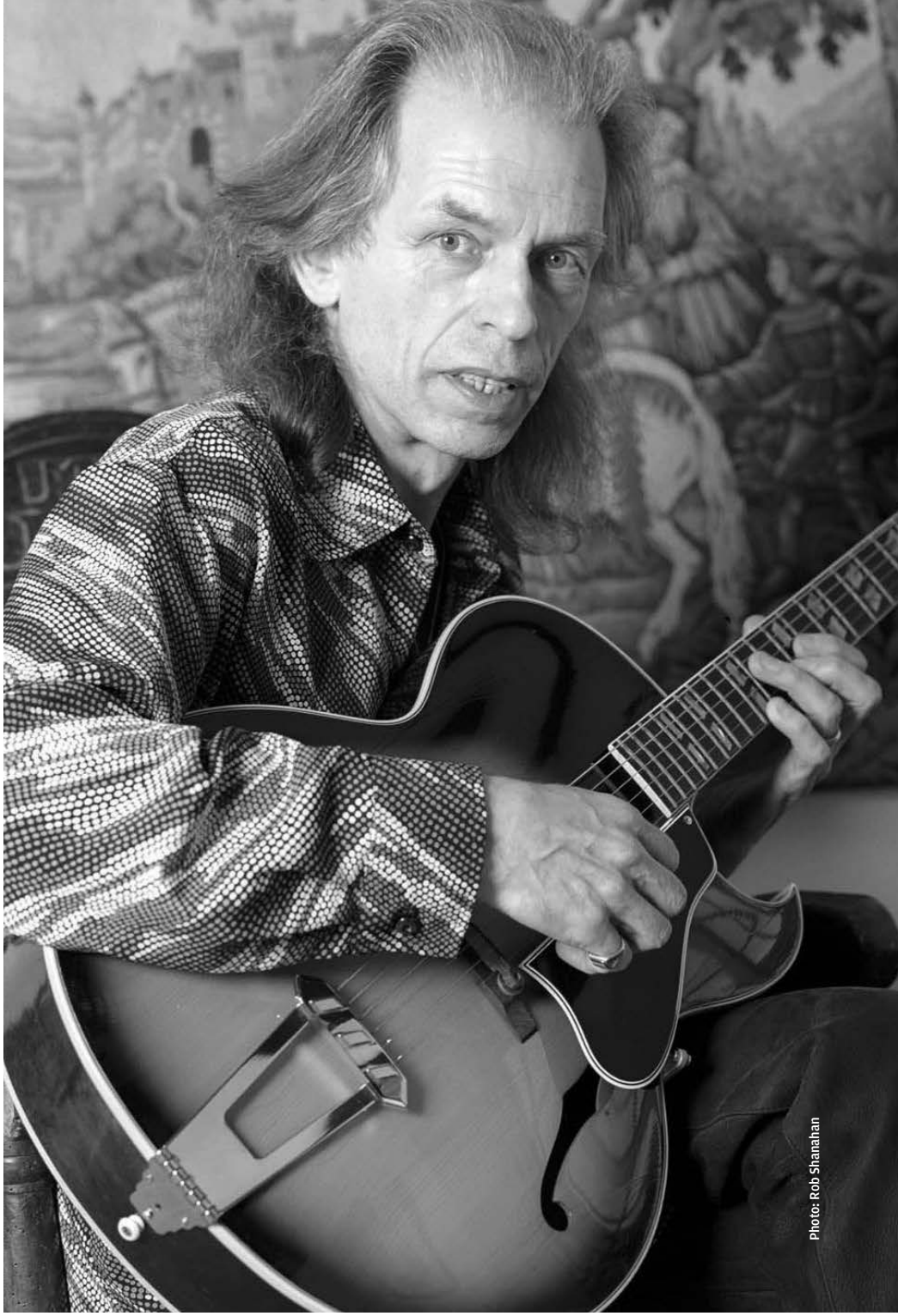
"My Epiphone Howard Roberts Custom is particularly rare, as the volume pot is on the scratchplate and the pickup is floating. I was doing a gig in Manchester around '73/'74 and Jon Anderson came in and said he'd seen this guitar, hadn't a clue what it was, but knew I'd like it.

"The staggered tailpiece is very orchestral-looking, designed to enhance the resonance from the strings from two different areas. I love the wide fingerboard and the tree inlay on the headstock, it's in mint condition. I've had quite a few Epiphones, but one by one they seem to go, although the HR is by far the best one I've ever come across."

Surveying the scene in Howe's studio – so many cases to open and so many guitar stories left untold – one thing you notice is that quite a few of the cases are new. Do they harbour new guitars?

"There are some very interesting and unique developments occurring within modern-day technology," he replies. "I'm the type of guitarist who likes this sort of stuff – it's what I've been fantasising about for years.

"Sure, the guitars in my collection are partly about investment, but for me it's what excites me that's more important. It's strange the way a guitar can influence your life; I mean, there have been times when the actual smell of a guitar in a case has been the deciding vote on the sale!'



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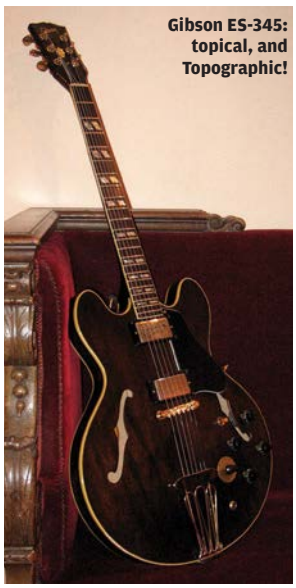
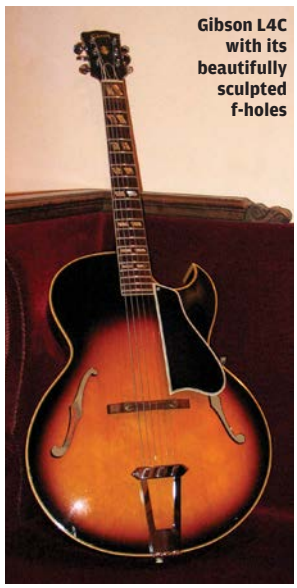
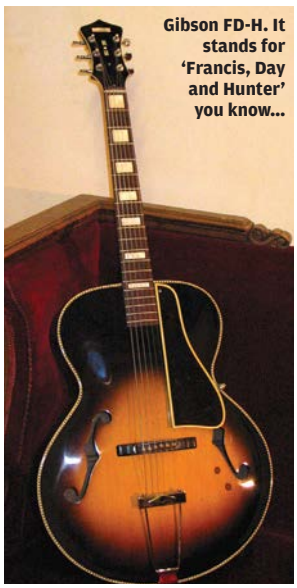


Gibson ES-345: topical, and Topographic!



Gibson L4C with its beautifully sculpted f-holes



Gibson FD-H. It stands for 'Francis, Day and Hunter' you know...

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Guitar & Bass **INTERVIEW**

Barrie Cadogan's 1962 Gibson ES-330

Barrie Cadogan, in-demand stage and studio guitarist with Primal Scream, Paul Weller, Edwyn Collins and many others, also packs a surfy, soulful punch with his own rock 'n' roll trio Little Barrie. He's also a passionate advocate of the virtues of Gibson's hollow-bodied ES-330.

Interview from **July 2011**

When Primal Scream signed up lead guitarist Barrie Cadogan a few years back, we were concerned that his groovesome bijou three-piece band Little Barrie would fall by the wayside. Thankfully, in between globe-trotting jaunts with the 'Scream, Cadogan has reunited with bassist Lewis Wharton and drummer Virgil Howe (son of Yes guitarist Steve Howe) and found time to continue to lay down some stone cold rock 'n' roll. Albums like 2011's *King Of The Waves* and 2014's *Shadow* are prime cases in point.

Barrie is a huge fan of the ES-330, and his '62 model remains his mainstay. He found it during his stint working at Vintage And Rare Guitars in London's Denmark Street... a tempting time.

"I had a '64 330 which was in better condition, but when this one came in I just liked it more. It cost me about £1,400, and that's cheap! It had the wrong Bigsby, but someone walked in off the street with an original Gibson one for sale so I bought that for £50 and the whole thing came alive. It's been used a lot. There's a big old dent on the neck and a couple of the tuners are bent, but nothing sounds quite like it."

The 330 stars on *King Of The Waves* opening track *Surf Hell*, while the next song, *How Come*, shows off his '63 ES-345... a more valuable guitar, but Barrie reckons the hollow, P-90-equipped 330 has the edge. "When you crank up a 330 or a Casino, they're more brutal, fatter and a bit cruder, but in a really good way – more bark, more aggression," he notes. "Clean, they're a bit more woody with more attack... they haven't got much sustain, but sometimes sustain can get in the way. I reckon 335s and 345s are smoother, a bit more bell-like, with more sustain and clarity. With 330s and Gretsches you can be more dynamic, and that gives me a more usable sound for what I do."

Like many others, Barrie has had his formerly stereo ES-345 rewired to mono, but he does love the much-maligned Varitone control. "Setting number 3 cuts the output so the sound cleans up a little bit and you get this weird, honky, slightly out of phase sound. It's brilliant... it sounds just like BB King on *Live At The Regal*.

"I generally go for Jazzmaster-type guitars or thinline hollowbodies... they're definitely my two favourite kind of electrics. They're similar in that they're not too forgiving. I think they give you something that Stratocasters, Telecasters and Les Pauls just don't have."

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ROYAL FLUSH

When it comes to the game of guitars, Tee Kay is holding one of the best hands we've seen in a while – a rare line-up of blue-chip archtops and thinlines. **LARS MULLEN** hears all about it

Tee Kay is a guitar player who has never let mere geography get in the way of fulfilling his lifelong passion for great American and British blues, rock and jazz. Tee Kay grew up in Lebanon during the 60s and initially became hooked on the sound of the great British blues boom. With the chance to witness gigs by his heroes such as Alexis Korner and John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers only a very, very distant possibility, he instead fed his passion by haunting the local record shops, sharing his knowledge with friends and, of course, by reading various guitar magazines.

As with so many before him, Tee Kay's fascination with the new blues wave of the 60s led him inexorably to discovering who and what had inspired those players in the first place. "I was lured more towards the roots of the blues," he explains, "and from then on, I went back in time and researched many of the early black musicians from Chicago and further back to the Mississippi Delta – the ones who had first inspired a lot of the more modern blues players. I also became fascinated by early jazz players... I still love Wes Montgomery's guitar work, and people like Miles Davis too. My parents were musically-minded and were always playing blues and jazz records from that era.

"All the music I seemed to like always had a big guitar sound, and I became interested in how the contrasting sounds of the guitar could vary so much depending on what guitar or amp was used. I hung out with a lot of local bands and learnt about their guitars and equipment, dreaming that one day I would either be in a band or own a fine instrument like the ones they played.

"I adore Gibson archtops – these guitars played such a major part in early blues and jazz"

"Back then I had a half-decent nylon-strung acoustic, which was a pretty good student model and fine for basic open chords, but I still had the dream of one day owning a famous brand. In my own pretend world, I assembled mock guitars from discarded gear or bought cheap electric models to reassemble and put a famous logo on the headstock to make them look like the real thing!

"To this day, all the music I'm interested in has a core blues and jazz element to it, but I wouldn't say that has totally dominated which guitars I have chosen to be in my collection. However, I do adore Gibson archtops and big-bodied semi-acoustics – the guitars which played such a major part in early blues and jazz – and also the solidbodies as played >

A 1963 Gibson ES-355TDC and a wonderful sunburst 1960 ES-335TD

Close cousins: a '56 ES-350 and a 1969 Byrdland

A '57 Gibson ES-295 and a '57 ES-225

The Tal Farlow signature guitar's smart tailpiece

Above, left to right, **A 1964 Gibson Tal Farlow and a mid-60s Gibson Johnny Smith.**

1956 Gibson ES-175N and a '52 Gibson ES-5.

1997 Gibson Jimmy Page Les Paul accompanying a Custom Shop Chet Atkins.

over the years by so many blues artists like the three Kings – Albert, Freddie and BB."

If Tee has a favourite guitar, it's the blonde 1969 Gibson L-5CESN he's pictured holding in the photograph on the opening page. "It seems to be the one I feel the most at home with and the one I go to for inspiration for most styles of music," he explains. "The humbuckers on these maple guitars – especially the neck pickups – seem to go effortlessly from old to modern blues and jazz, and the neck profile and playability on this guitar just seems to work for me every time. It was also a number one choice for many of the early high-profile players, and it's now a vintage model, of course.

"I've also always loved 50s and 60s Gibson thinline models. They were played by a host of people, from the original big jazz bands to blues and rock 'n' roll players. They were very modern-looking guitars when they were introduced... quite a contrast to the earlier deep-bodied archtops.

"For me, the stereo Gibson ES-355 has always been the Freddie King guitar. My one is a '63 in cherry with the ebony fingerboard, the six-way Varitone switch and the Maestro vibrola. My friend Otis Grand – who I think is one of the best UK-based blues players – often borrows this one to use live.

"The ES-335 was of course the cheaper version, but it's just about everybody's favourite thinline Gibson, and it was put on the map by a lot of modern electric players, like Alvin Lee and of course Eric Clapton. This one dates from 1960 and it's one of the most collectable thinlines I've got. It has the classic thin 1960 neck, dot markers, a stop tailpiece, a pair of PAFs and the early long pickguard, and looks wonderful in this exceptionally clean tobacco sunburst finish.

"Here's another Gibson thinline, an ES-350T made in 1956 with a maple body, a flamed maple top and a Brazilian rosewood fingerboard. The P-90 pickups have this very sweet and detailed clarity. It's a very lively and versatile guitar, and it's at home on all sorts of styles... even Chuck Berry used one of these. This one here is one of only 62 produced in maple and it's a kind of a precursor to the short-scale Byrdland model next to it, which is a '69 in sunburst with a pair of humbuckers.

"The next two Gibsons are an ES-295 from 1957 and a ES-225TDN, also built in '57. The 295 is from the famous Scott Chinery collection. He was one of the biggest collectors in the USA, and would only buy the best of the best, so it's in superb condition.

"The extra frills on the ES-295 launched it towards being more of a top-end model, and it's always been regarded as the Scotty Moore model, as he used one as his main guitar when he worked with Elvis Presley. This one is quite rare as it's got a pair of factory PAFs, and the gold finish is in really good order. It's real gold paint, so finding one this clean is a task in itself. It's not mint... there are some small lacquer cracks appearing, but if it had been perfect I wouldn't have bought it, as it would surely have been refinished.

"The ES-225 was a simple, no-frills model, more a

budget version of the thinline range. A lot of the up-and-coming blues guys in Chicago and the Midwest can be seen with this particular model in early photographs. They're not easy to find as a lot were not worth repairing if they were damaged, and they were often broken down for parts. This is a really sweet-sounding guitar. The P-90s seem to be extra loud for some reason, and I'm really comfortable with the big neck. I play this one a lot!

"Most of my guitars are pretty clean for their age. A lot of dealers would claim they are mint, but they're not, because they've been played. For me, they've got the right amount of wear, like the patina on the hardware, but I like the wood to be in top condition without buckle marks or serious dents.

"Some arrive a bit gritty and dirty, so I just take them apart and clean and polish out any greasy marks with just a clean cloth. Polishing products can harm bare wood; some of these guitars have developed fine lacquer cracks through age and I really don't want any polish getting into the wood. I'm suspicious of any 'as new' vintage guitars with perfect finishes, unplayed frets and pristine hardware. Some collectors will say the sound and the tone is more important than the condition... well, I like to have both!

"I'm not a big collector of signature guitars, and during the 50s and 60s there weren't actually that many produced, but I do have a few, like this 1964 Gibson Tal Farlow. Farlow was a fine jazz player, who was also known as 'the octopus' because of his large hands and wide spread over the fingerboard.

"This guitar is built in the true tradition of early Gibson archtops and it has some very distinctive appointments like the scroll inlay around the Venetian cutaway, J-200-style "crest" position markers inlaid upside down, and a wooden plaque in the tailpiece with Tal's name engraved on it. The one I have was actually ordered by Farlow himself with an extra-large headstock.

"Here's a Gibson dedicated to the fantastic American jazz guitarist Johnny Smith, who played with all the greats and wrote *Walk, Don't Run*, a 1959 hit for The Ventures. He specified that he didn't want any holes drilled in the body, so the mini humbuckers and controls were all part of the scratchplate assembly. This guitar dates from '65 and has a really nice timbre, both acoustically and through an amp, although the mini-humbuckers are a bit prone to feedback at higher volume levels."

Blonde finish Gibsons from the 50s are among the most collectable of all, and Tee Kay has a few more yet to show us. "The '56 ES-175 is another Chinery collection guitar, and the rarity factor is really in the blonde finish and the P-90 pickups. There aren't many blonde models built as early as this, when the ES-175 was the workhorse model of every jazz man from Joe Pass onwards.

"With three P-90s, and again with a blonde finish, this Gibson ES-5 dates from 1952 and it's got an exceptionally wide range of tones. Each pickup has a separate volume control, and there's just one master tone control. This particular model was used by a host of great players, from blues legend >

Above, left to right,
A sunburst Gibson L-5 from 1937 and a blonde example from 1941.

One of the original – and deteriorating – L-5 pickguards.

Beautiful black 1951 Gibson L-4 and a '51 L-7CE with a McCarty pickup.

1930 National Style O beside a '38 Epiphone Deluxe with DeArmond pickup.

T-Bone Walker through to Frank Zappa. This is the actual guitar featured in the Gibson Electrics reference book by AR Duchossoir. Otis Grand found this one for me... I can't thank him enough.

"I have a '97 Jimmy Page Les Paul Standard, which is slightly out of character with the vintage theme of my collection – in fact, it's the newest one here. I've always loved Page's work from the early days right up to the Led Zeppelin albums. Modern guitars of this nature can play unbelievably well. The various push-pull controls give you a variety of sounds and out-of-phase permutations from the humbuckers."

Next up is something really spectacular – a Custom Shop Gibson made as a prototype for Chet Atkins himself. "It's taken some serious work to find some of these guitars," Tee explains. "I travel a lot in my job, especially in the USA, where they have a very deep market for vintage guitars.

"Almost every town in the USA has a guitar shop, many of which also have vintage guitars, and a lot of big collectors seem to be over there as well as the key dealers. I've developed a good relationship with a guy based in California called David Brass, who is in fact British. He only deals with serious collectors and he now knows what I like, so I often get a phone call as a first choice on some of the finer guitars that have surfaced after many years, or guitars from high-profile people who are selling things from some incredible collections.

"The Custom Shop Chet Atkins came from the actor Stephen Segal's collection. It was made in 1987. It wasn't one that I was chasing, or even knew about, but when David sent me the specifications, I had to buy it!

"The craftsmanship is quite remarkable, with the large 17" thinline-style body and the finest birdseye maple used for the body and the headstock cap, which is inlaid in abalone with the Gibson script logo and Chet Atkins' signature. All the hardware is gold, including Gibson's own Rotomatic tuners with flip-out buttons, and the Tree Of Life inlay goes up the ebony fingerboard all the way to the 19th fret. It's a very unique guitar.

"I don't collect guitars for the sake of making money. I've never sold a single guitar, and I'm not planning to! I enjoy every one and look forward to the times when I can spend the whole day with them in a private and secure lockup, and just take two away at a time to keep in my office to play. So they are rotated on a regular basis."

Next, we travel back in time with the first pair of Tee's unamplified archtops. "The Gibson L-5 is a delightful model, the epitome of the guitars used in the early big jazz bands. These are highly collectable, but that doesn't necessarily mean very expensive, especially compared to a Fender from the same period.

"I have two L-5s here. This sunburst one is from 1937, and it's called the 'Advanced' model because of the larger 17" body, introduced in 1935. It's got gold hardware and a figured bookmatched tiger stripe flame maple top. The other one is a blonde version dating from 1941, formerly owned by the guitar

historian Walter Carter, and featured in his book *Gibson: 100 Years Of An American Icon*, and also in his book entirely on L-5s.

"One of the problems on some of these guitars is the pickguard. The nitrocellulose that they're made of breaks down over the years and they shrink, warp and eventually start to crumble. It doesn't happen to every one, so you can't tell if it will or not. This one has been replaced, but I have the original kept in a plastic bag, and you can see how it's gone like brown sugar in places!

"Here are two more from Gibson's L Series. This acoustic L-4 from '51 is quite rare in factory black. It's lost some of the high gloss on its original finish, but it has the played-in patina that I like very much.

"Next to it is a tobacco sunburst L-7CE, also from 1951. The L-7 was the top of the L range, with fine appointments which included a hand-carved solid spruce top and a two-piece solid carved maple body. The neck is two-piece maple with a mahogany centre, and the fingerboard is Brazilian rosewood inlaid with double parallelogram position markers.

"This was of course the early days of the electric guitar, so it's fitted with a McCarty pickup. These wonderful guitars were for the guys who played in the rhythm section at the back of those early orchestras and big bands, rather than the louder lead players who were at the front showing of their virtuosity and melody.

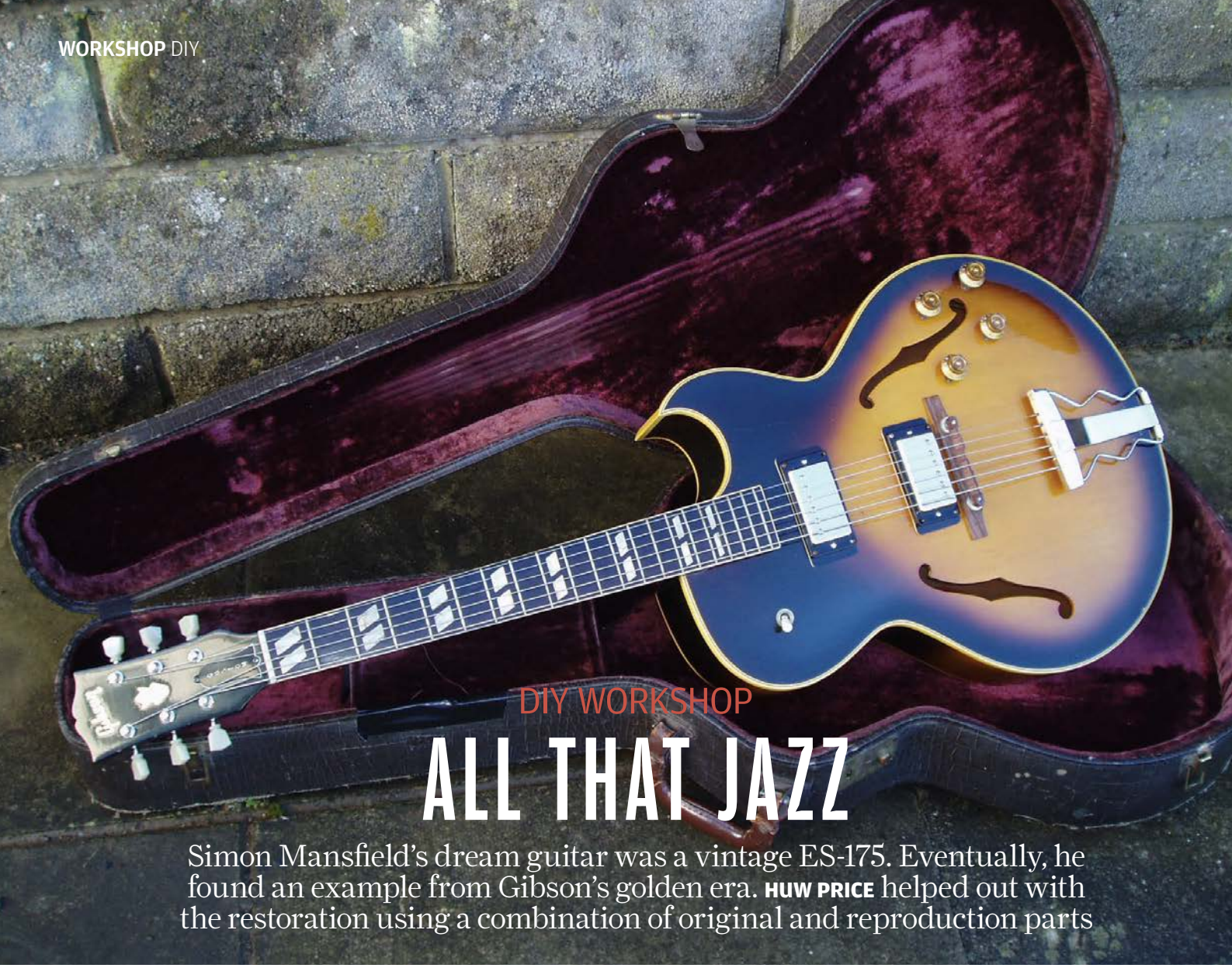
"Going way back to when I researched early blues guitarists, I was always fascinated by the sound of a resonator, especially in the hands of a really good slide player. I have a National Style O from 1930; I've kept it clean, but not buffed to perfection. It's still got the player's hue that I feel it should have.

"The 1938 Epiphone Masterbilt Deluxe was an opportunistic buy from a friend who happened to be selling it – I decided it needed to live with my other guitars of the same age! This was an expensive and powerfully loud archtop of its day. At some point a DeArmond floating pickup assembly has been added... it works well, and I won't be taking it off.

"I go on the basis that any serious collector – of anything really, not just guitars – should have some form of discipline, otherwise it becomes an addiction. You have to compromise. I could spend a year looking for a certain guitar, and during that time I might see many in various conditions with all sorts of price tags. Sometimes it's important to resist; I've learnt that if you have doubts then you need to back off, as there will be a better one – and when you find that one, the key is not to hesitate, but to pay up and buy it.

"For me, guitar collecting – especially vintage guitar collecting – is a reflection of the older generation. We followed those early bands and were enthralled by their music and the sounds their instruments produced.

"Who knows what will happen to these guitars in the future? I wonder if the next generation will continue to value them? I hope my children and the generations beyond will cherish these guitars as a representation of the music from the 50s and 60s, which created the music of today."



DIY WORKSHOP

ALL THAT JAZZ

Simon Mansfield's dream guitar was a vintage ES-175. Eventually, he found an example from Gibson's golden era. **HUW PRICE** helped out with the restoration using a combination of original and reproduction parts

The ES-175 has been Gibson's best-selling jazz box since 1949 and the trademark of countless greats including Joe Pass, Pat Metheny, Herb Ellis and even Steve Howe. Amazingly, it has never been out of production.

The ES-175 started out with a single P-90 pickup at the neck and a trapeze tailpiece. Two-pickup versions with a second set of volume and tone controls were introduced in 1953. In 1957, ES-175s were graced with single or double PAF humbuckers and a newly-designed zig-zag tailpiece. In quality terms, everything went a bit pear-shaped during the latter half of the 1960s and through the 1970s, but in recent decades Gibson's jazz guitars have much improved.

"I was looking for a guitar for playing old-school swing and bebop," explains *Guitar & Bass* reader Simon Mansfield. "The thought of owning something of the same vintage as the music I love appealed." Eventually, he turned up a clean 1958 example – but it had no original hardware.

Many late-1950s ES-175s have suffered this fate because Les Pauls from that era shared the same knobs, truss-rod cover, switch tip, tuners and pickups. Since an all-original 1957-1960 ES-175 will fetch only $10,000-15,000 and an equivalent Les Paul can command in excess of $200,000, it's inevitable that many ES-175s have been harvested for parts – sometimes for restorations, but sometimes for darker purposes. All the same, the low price and the old wood were too good to pass up.

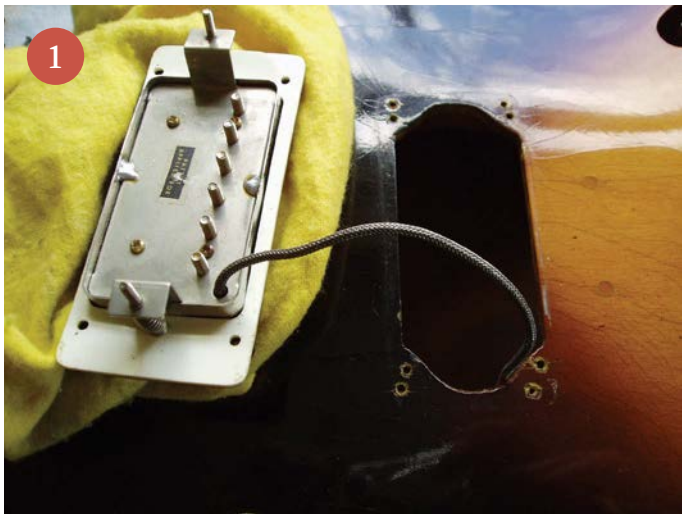
However, the history of this particular ES-175 isn't completely straightforward: there are two filled holes in between the pickups, and the dealer confirmed that the guitar had once been fitted with a Charlie Christian pickup. During the late 1970s, Gibson sold an ES-175CC model, but Gibson tells us that custom-ordered ES-175s with CC pickups were also available during the late 50s.

Upon removing the neck pickup, we could see the pickup holes, and because the sunburst finish continued over the edges of the rout we concluded that Simon's guitar probably left the factory with a single CC pickup. The third pickup fixing screw would have been closer to the bridge, but any evidence went when the guitar was converted into a double-humbucker model.

Luckily, the rout for the bridge pickup is perfect and the holes for the extra controls are correctly located. Surprisingly, a vintage two-pickup wiring harness was also installed, with original metal covers over the pots that have kept them clean and noise-free and a 'canister'-style jack socket.

Tuners

While he was negotiating with the vendor, Simon learned that the



original single-ring Kluson tuners had still been on the guitar when it came into the shop. Since so many of the original parts were missing, they had decided to sell them separately, and a set of repros had been fitted to the ES-175.

Once it was established that the headstock hadn't been drilled or modified in any way, Simon decided to pay extra for the original tuners. Old Kluson buttons can be badly deteriorated, but these were in great shape. The only thing needed was a re-grease, and the process is very easy: you can do this to any guitar fitted with Klusons.

You'll need a syringe to inject the grease, so it'll help if you've got a friend who's a doctor or a nurse. Put some car grease or Vaseline into an empty jam jar and warm it in a bain marie – a hot water bath – until it starts to go soft or runny. Pack some into the syringe, place the sharp end over (or into) the hole just above the gear, then squeeze in the grease or Vaseline until it starts to ooze out from the sides of the casing. Once the lubricant cools, your tuners should feel smoother and firmer.

The repro tuners were removed and the new bushes were carefully tapped out from the back. Don't try to prise them from the front: you'll damage the headstock. The original bushings were easy to push back in, and once the old tuners were fitted they turned out firmer and more precise than the repros – and best of all, the tuning held rock-solid.

Pickups

Judging by the mysterious extra holes that were hidden under thin plastic spacers, the pickups that had replaced the original CC were long gone. Shiny new Gibson '57 Classics had now been fitted, and although they're fine rock and blues pickups, they didn't look or sound right for a 1950s jazz guitar. So Spencer Mumford of Shed Pickups in Cardiff (www.shedpickups.com) was commissioned to make a set of aged replicas – aka PAF Daddies.

Optimistically imagining that the CC pickup would have been replaced just at the end of the PAF era, we decided to go with double white butyrate bobbins that Spencer had already reliced. The process for aging nickel-plated covers is quite involved. Spencer began with a tub of salt water and a 12V electrical supply. The positive terminal was held against the cover and the negative was moved over the top, taking care not to touch it. This rapidly took the shine off the covers.

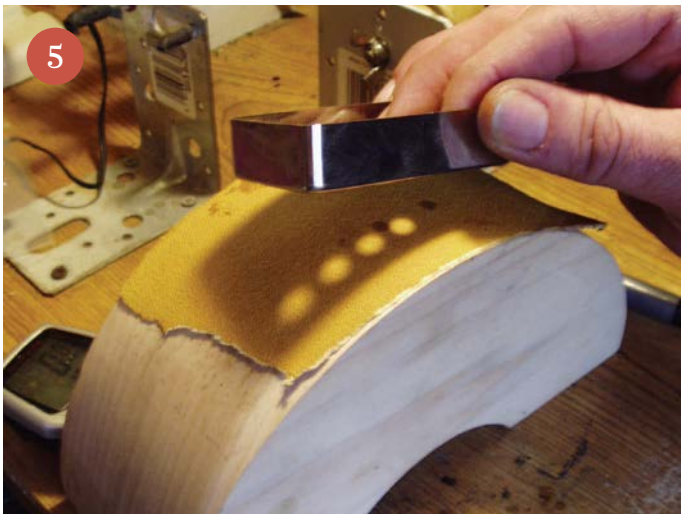
Once he was happy, Spencer rolled the covers over some abrasive paper that was glued to a semi-circular neck support to simulate the typical pitting). Vintage covers usually have a 'striped' look where the metal is shinier under the strings, so Spencer applied strips of masking tape and carefully polished the exposed metal >

1 Filled holes to the right of the pickup cavity suggest that a Charlie Christian pickup may once have been fitted

2 Injecting softened grease into the original tuners to make them useable again

3 The old tuners, greased, reinstalled and ready to go

4 Electrically aging the covers. It's a skilled process



5 Pitting the covers by carefully rolling them over abrasive paper

6 Adding the wear pattern by polishing stripes onto the covers

7 Pickup covers before and after the 'playing wear' treatment

8 The finished pickups – really convincing even under the cover

areas to simulate the effect. We were amazed to see that the lead-out wires, base plates and all the internal parts were aged with the same care, despite the fact that nobody would be able to check inside without de-soldering the covers. Long Alnico IV magnets were used, along with maple spacers and repro 'Patent Applied For' transfers on the bottom.

The pickups are connected to the volume pots, but rather than remove the old covers and replace sections of the original harness we decided to join the pickup leads onto the original leads protruding from the pot covers. To get at them, it was necessary to pull the volume pots out through the bridge pickup hole.

After removing the knobs, we tied lengths of nylon twine to each pot in the recess below each split shaft and added another length of twine to the thread of the output jack. The nuts and pointers were carefully removed and the harness was pushed into the body. Once you've finished soldering, the lengths of twine are used to pull the component parts back through their respective holes. This can be a fiddly job, but on this occasion it proved quite easy.

The tailpiece

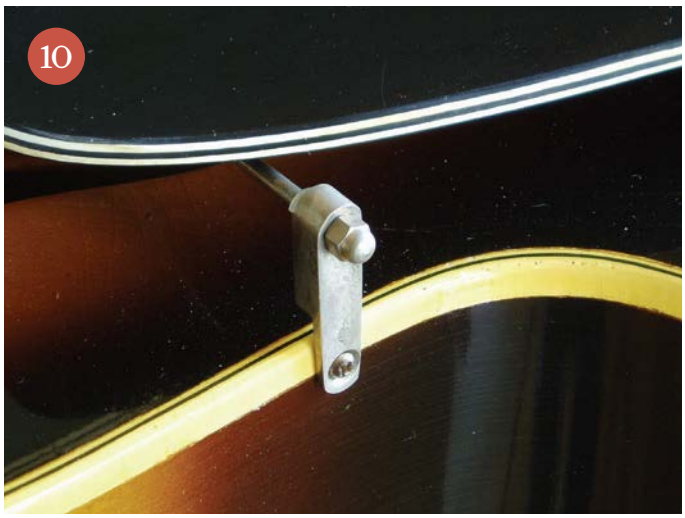
The guitar arrived with a chrome-plated repro tailpiece – and like all repros, it looked wrong. The points of the zig-zag are too far away from the central bar... and anyway, the originals were nickel-plated, not chrome-plated.

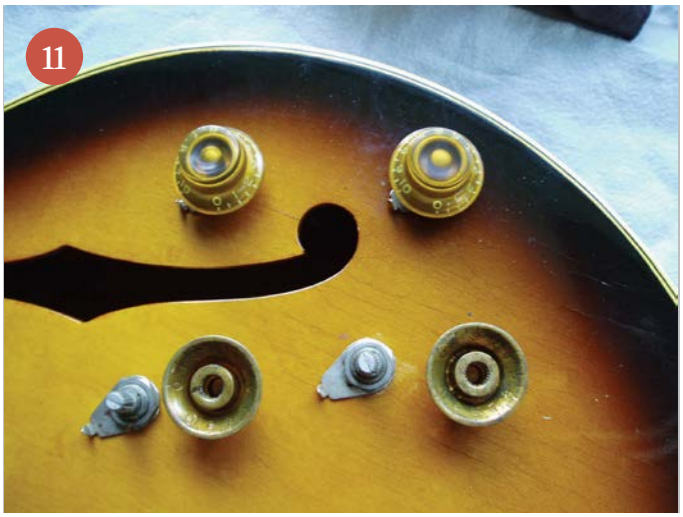
Research revealed that originals are as rare as hen's teeth. We did find one, but the asking price was $795, so it was decided to make do with the repro. The original idea was to get it re-plated in nickel, but once at the local electroplaters it was revealed that most chrome-plated metal items actually have a layer of plated nickel already there under the chrome. Within five minutes the platers had removed the chrome, and what was left was a lovely nickel-covered tailpiece, all ready for the aging process.

Instead of the electronic method, this time I used PCB etchant solution, also known as ferric chloride. This stuff is sold for making printed circuit boards, and you can easily buy it from suppliers like Maplins. Make sure you dilute the etchant to a 1:1 ratio with water, or even weaker, because its effect on nickel is almost instantaneous! Dip the metal into the solution, check it every few seconds and wash the part thoroughly under running water as soon as you're happy with the results.

Pickguard

Buying repro pickguards for an existing guitar is risky because back in the day the spacing of the two pickups wasn't entirely consistent. Also, some Gibson archtop guards have a pin fixing at the neck end,





while others have screw holes. We located an original, but discovered – predictably – that it wouldn't fit. Fortunately the seller had agreed to a 48-hour approval period and we were able to cunningly use the guard to create a template for guitar builder Dave Dearnaley (0292 046 2953) who made a convincingly aged repro from five-ply plastic. Allparts UK provided a nickel-plated bracket, and it turned out very well after being aged with ferric chloride like the tailpiece.

Plastics

Some of the repro plastics out there are so realistic that you've got to be realistic, too. How can you ever be completely sure that the 'genuine' vintage parts that crop up on some auction sites are quite what they purport to be? Besides which, do original plastic parts actually make a guitar sound better?

We were delighted with the knobs and switch tip we bought from Fatboy (www.fatboyguitars.co.uk). The knobs area a deep amber gold with subtle green verdigris on the underside.

Finishing up

The guitar did need a light fret stoning, and in the end it played like butter. Instead of blowing our own trumpet, we decided to leave the final words to the proud owner.

"I was amazed. This is now a great guitar," says Simon. "I just can't stop playing it. It feels very light and comfortable to hold, the action is low and easy, and I'm astonished at how responsive it is. Playing harder or softer and plucking the strings in different places produces a huge variety of different sounds.

"At high volume, there's no feedback at all, but to me it sounds best played clean through my Fender Deluxe Reverb at low volume. That "between acoustic and electric" level is where you really hear the guitar's subtleties. The restoration has also made a big aesthetic difference. It was pretty sexy-looking to start with, but now it just somehow looks happy! People might think my guitar has been compromised by the modifications that have taken place over the years, but to me the fact that it's lived a little makes it more interesting. I now have the pleasure of playing a vintage instrument that has been lovingly restored – and because I only paid a fraction of the cost of a mint example, I don't have to worry about gigging with it.

"It's an ongoing project. An original late-50s Brazilian rosewood bridge is already on its way, along with a Fake58 trussrod cover. In time maybe I'll find a reasonably-priced original pickguard and tailpiece. To me, this guitar now looks, feels and sounds like an instrument that's about to enter its prime. I'm looking forward to playing it for many years to come."

9 Covered volume pots pulled through bridge pickup rout. Note protective padding!

10 Repro five-ply pickguard and home-aged Allparts bracket

11 Fatboy's aged gold bell knobs are a bargain at £12

12 The finished article

DIY WORKSHOP

HOLLOW VICTORY

Working on hollowbody electrics comes with its own set of problems. We overhaul a '62 ES-330, tackling some of the difficulties you too might encounter...

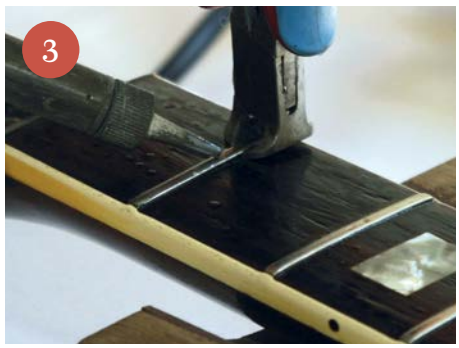
Over the next three pages we'll be tracking the reconditioning overhaul of a fine semi-acoustic, a 1962 Cherry Red Gibson ES-330TD with block markers. It's a perfect example of a Gibson thinline, and everything we cover will be relevant not just to 330s but also to all the members of the slim 300 series, such as the 335, and others besides. The ES-330 – once regarded as slightly second-rate when compared to the 335 due to its fully hollow construction, its non-height adjustable P-90 pickups and its limited upper-fretboard access – is now the most popular it's ever been thanks to its bluesey, jazzy and wonderfully dynamic sound.

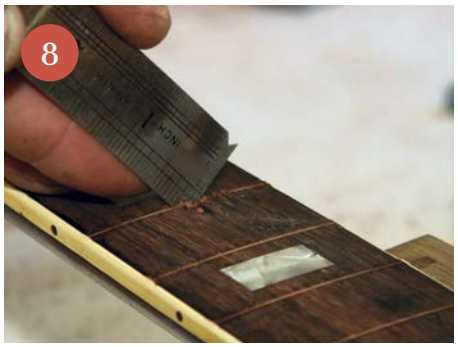
This one is a great guitar, but it needs work. The frets will need to be replaced, and as the 330 has a bound fretboard, that's not a simple job. The electrics are showing signs of age, and badly need a makeover. Getting the wiring harness in and out is a bit of a black art, and even when you know the tricks, it's a real test of patience.

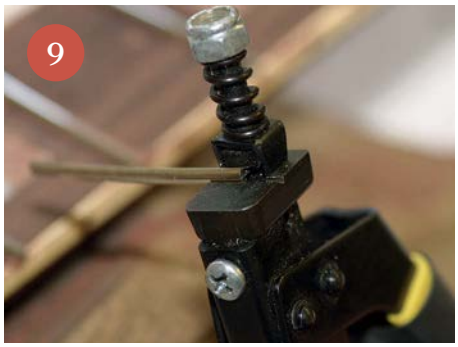
If you're planning to undertake repairs on a guitar like this for somebody else, then have a good look at it first. If there are any scratches, unoriginal parts or damage, make a note of them. Aside from a bent tuner, however, this guitar is almost perfect.

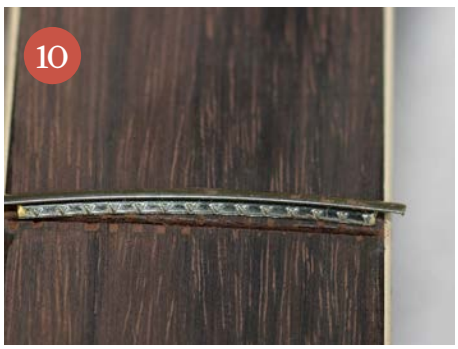
First, the refret. You can see from the photo that these frets have been stoned a number of times, so they're very low and flat. This may make it comfy to play but it can mess up the intonation because the strings will leave the frets close to the front edge of the fret rather than the centre. Before taking out the frets it's a good idea to soak the fretboard with lemon oil to stop the area around the frets breaking out when they're pulled. We'll also heat the frets with a soldering iron at the same time as pulling them out; this will draw the oil towards the fret and help them slide out cleanly. Very often, frets are glued in with Titebond wood glue at the edges, so heating them will also soften the glue and stop you pulling half the fretboard away. Just pray the frets haven't been stuck in with superglue! Use proper flush-jawed fret-pullers, but don't panic if the board gets chipped a little: you can just put a tiny dab of superglue (put it on the edge of a Stanley knife blade first to avoid splurging it all over the guitar), let it run under any loose pieces of fretboard, then hold it down for a few seconds.

We now need to level the fretboard. This one's had over 45









years of playing, so it's quite bad. It would be hard to flatten it out completely: the most we can hope for is to get it flat under and around the frets, and straight at the same time. First find out the radius of the fretboard using a template, then select the corresponding sanding block. Ours is 12" long, and we'll line it first with 180 grit glasspaper to get the board straight, then 320 grit to clean it to a suitable finish. Make sure you adjust the truss rod to get the neck straight before you start sanding, and check it with a proper straight-edge. When it comes to cleaning and possibly deepening the slots, there's a great little saw available from www.stewmac.com that's made with two sets of teeth, one cutting on the pull and one cutting on the push. On a bound fretboard like this, though, a normal saw would cut through the binding, so I'll use another tool to scrape out rubbish from the slots – a small ruler with two notches cut out of the corners.

Our Jim Dunlop fretwire is about as close to the original as you can get. Start by clipping all the frets to length, then cut out the notch at the end of the fret to sit over the binding. To do this you'll need a fret tang nipper, available from Touchstone Tonewoods. Make sure the fret tang that's left sits a little in from the binding at each end.

Getting the electrics out of a hollowbody guitar is a black art, even when you know the trick

I buy fretwire in coils, as this way it comes with a radius already on it; if you don't, you'll have to bend the fretwire using a pair of pliers to get a radius about 2" tighter than that of the fretboard. It's a good idea to give the fret ends a little extra bend to help make sure they stay down, and also to use two tiny dabs of Titebond, one at each end.

Now, gently and evenly tap the fret down a little, but not all the way as we're going to use a different tool to seat them perfectly – a caul with a radius exactly the same that of the fretboard. Use the caul to get as close to the heel as you can (for the rest, we'll use another special tool that's just the ticket). The frets will now need levelling and dressing, but in this article we're going to move straight on to the tricky business of hollowbody electrics.

The 330's crackly pots means we've got to take the electrics out, and this can be stressful unless a few simple rules are followed. I recently had a Gretsch archtop in for repair, and whoever had >

1 Bent tuners can be straightened with padded pliers

2 Flat frets can give rise to intonation problems

3 Extracting frets with fret-pullers and soldering iron

4 Fingerboard chips can be restuck with superglue

5 Assess the fingerboard radius with a template

6 Sanding the board with the correct radius block

7 Cleaning the fret slots with a special push-pull saw

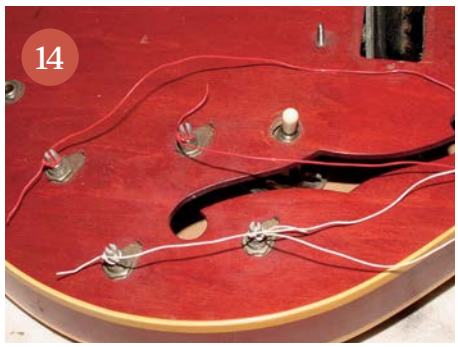
8 You can also use a specially sharpened notched ruler

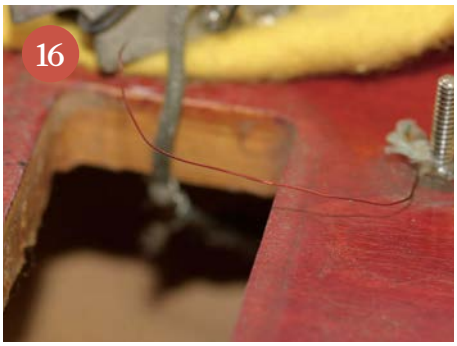
9 Fret tang nipper makes clearance for the binding

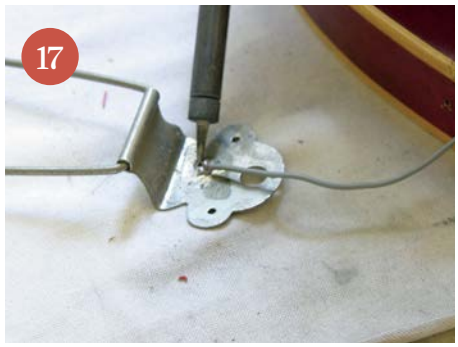
10 A prepared fret with the tang nipped off correctly

11 Installing the frets, first with light hammer taps...

12 ...and pushing them home with a proper fret caul







13 Installing the upper frets with a special long clamp

14 Link the pots together in pairs with loops of wire

15 Controls are hauled out through the pickup cavity

16 This earth wire to the bridge post is a later bodge

17 The earth is properly resoldered to the tailpiece

18 The reverse procedure. It'll test your patience!

worked on it before had not been able to work how to get the electrics out, so they'd cut a six-inch square access panel in the back of the guitar... not the way to go!

After you've removed all the control knobs and pickup screws, it's time for the clever bit. I've cut a piece of wire about 600mm long and attached one end to one pot and the other end to one of the others (the same is done for the other pair). Keeping the wire attached at both ends will mean you don't lose the end of the wire inside the guitar, and it will also keep all the nuts and washers in the right place. The pots can now all be pulled out through the pickup hole and cleaned with switch cleaner. You can also freshen up the contacts on the switch using a piece of 1200-grit wet and dry. Plug the guitar in and check that the pots are noise-free before you to put it all back together, or you'll have to go through the whole procedure again.

At some time, this guitar has had a piece of wire added from the bridge support screw to the underside of the pickup, probably because someone forgot to replace the earth wire running to the tailpiece. We'll replace this as original to stop the strings from acting as an aerial.

Now we can start to pull everything back through the correct holes: you'll still need to wiggle things around a bit, but with patience you'll soon be there. In the past, I've tried tying pieces of wire around the jack socket and all that happens is the wire gets stuck on the jack socket and you end up taking the whole lot out again.

Use the correct-sized spanner to tighten all the nuts up: incorrect ones slip and scratch guitars. The control knobs are all a little loose, so I've opened up the shafts a little; be careful, or you'll break them.

Now for the final tweaks – adjusting the polepieces to give an even sound across the pickup and setting the action at the bridge, which is just a case of turning the thumbwheels up or down – do remember to slacken the strings beforehand or you'll strip the thread. As you'll have learned, fixing a 330 or a 335 is no small task, thanks to the difficulty of extracting the electronics. If in doubt, see an expert... and make sure they don't cut a hole in the back!

19 Reinstalling the jack socket... never an easy job

20 Adjusting the polepieces for even string response

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DIY WORKSHOP

GIBSON GARAGE

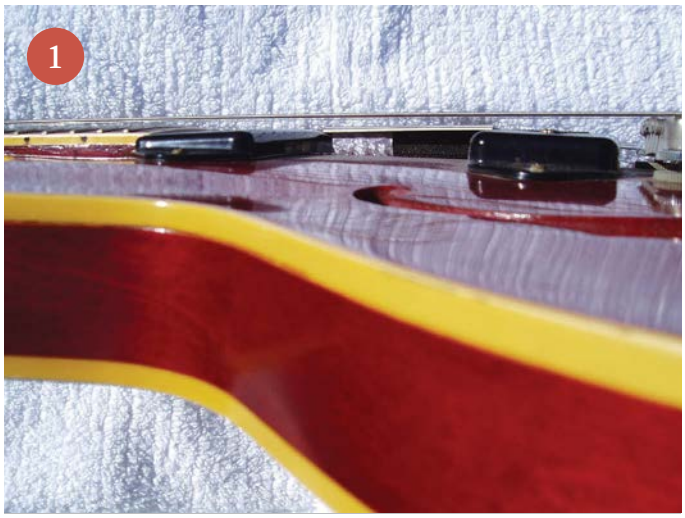
Switching our attention to a 1961 ES-330, **HUW PRICE** continues with the mission to help ensure your Gibson plays like butter by highlighting more issues typical to semis and hollowbodies

The subject of this article is a rather fine 1961 Gibson ES-330 that just needs a bit of careful attention to bring it back to its best. These great guitars are fairly common, and the old ones are almost identical to modern and vintage incarnations of the Epiphone Casino. Some of the problems we'll be tackling are also typical to other Gibson models, and none should have a negative impact on the originality and the value of the guitar.

Pickup balance

Both the ES-330s I have owned sounded much beefier and gutsier on the neck pickup than on the bridge. Lots of ES-330 and Casino owners have tried to get around this problem by overwinding the bridge pickup for extra output – but renowned pickup maker Lindy Fralin advocates underwinding the neck pickup instead. I must admit I'd be reluctant to rewind any perfectly good vintage pickup. Neck pickups are always louder than bridge pickups and, in the case of ES-330s, the problem is compounded because the bridge pickup is comparatively further away from the strings.

Since Allparts UK sells P-90 shims, I decided to try lifting the coil further upwards (luckily, you don't need to de-solder anything for this, because the pickup will pass through the hole in the centre). I started by measuring the existing clearance between the pickup covers and the strings; both covers



were actually at angles to the strings, and the neck clearance was 3/16" and 1/8", while the bridge cover clearance measured 3/16" and 7/32" – so it seemed logical to custom-taper an 1/8" shim.

Allparts shims come oversized, and since I wanted the guitar to look as original as possible after the job was done, I decided to trim the edges of the shim to fit. I covered the outside edges of the shim with masking tape, then screwed the pickup down on top. Even with the shim in place, the original pickup screws were still long enough to hold everything down.

Next, I traced the outline of the pickup onto the masking tape, and used a G clamp to hold a whetstone on top of the shim to act as a guide for my craft saw. The shim is made from a fairly soft and flexible plastic and it didn't take long to cut out the rough outline before using sandpaper to form the curves. After a quick check under the P-90 cover I secured the shim to a flat surface and used a flat sanding block to taper the shim, leaving 1/16" on the neck side and 1/8" on the bridge side. After a final check with the shim in place, I smoothed it all over using 600 grit wet and dry followed by 1200 grit, and then I gave it a final buff-up with some T-Cut.

This method will completely solve your pickup balance problem. You will lose some of that honky, slightly hollow bridge tone, but the bridge setting will sound much louder, brighter and more powerful. The extra bite and aggression is so pronounced, it might even stop you 'gassing' for a Les Paul Junior!

Pickguard warping

Old nitrate pickguards are notorious for warping. It's not so bad on a Fender guitar where the scratchplate is held flat by screws all around the outside, but the jazz-style four-ply guards on 50s and 60s guitars have nothing to keep them from curling. The guards on many ES-330s curl up between the pickup covers, severely obstructing your pick and finger access to the high strings.

To straighten a nitrate guard, you have to apply heat, but you have to be cautious because nitrate is flammable. It's known that burning nitrate can release poisonous cyanide gas, so it's best to avoid putting your pickguard in the oven, as some suggest. Remember, if you smell almonds, then get out – fast! The key is to control the heat carefully, and after an abortive attempt with a hairdryer, I resorted to that great standby of the amateur luthier – the electric iron.

First I carefully removed the guard's rectangular foam spacer and metal bracket and placed it face down near the edge of a flat surface. Next, I clamped each end with a G clamp to hold things flat while I applied the heat. Since the middle section of the guard >

1 The ES-330's P-90s are non-height adjustable, often leading to balance problems – but it's fixable

2 The P-90 shim before trimming

3 Cutting it to size using a sharpening stone as a guide for the saw.

4 The finished job

5 Another view of the pickup shim

6 Spot the warped pickguard.

7 Applying heat with an iron

8 Clamping the guard while it cools

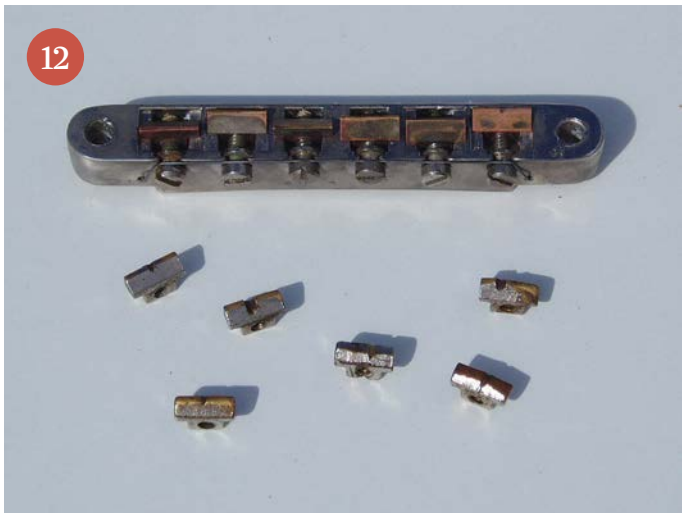
was the curliest bit, I put an old rag on top of the guard for protection and placed the iron on top of that. Using the 'wool' setting I left it there for a minute or so; then, after removing the iron, I placed a flat block on the area of interest to spread the pressure before adding a third clamp to hold the guard flat as it cooled down. Once it was completely cool, I removed the clamps and the guard seemed much straighter, so I repeated the procedure once more, and after this the guard was almost completely flat. I decided to leave a bit of bendiness in it because the amount of curl was no longer interfering with playability, and features like that are part of the charm of old guitars. But a second curved area between the front screwhole and the neck pickup also required some attention to stop the guard lifting towards the bridge pickup. The foam spacer was re-attached with a dab of Araldite, and then – after a quick polish – I re-fitted the pickguard to the guitar.

Flying trapeze

Since ES-330s and Casinos are completely hollow, there's no solid centre-block where an ES-335-type stop tailpiece can be installed. These models always had a trapeze tailpiece, but many, like Bernard Butler's black ES-330, were retro-fitted with Bigsby B7 vibratos. When I bought my ES-330 I was specifically looking for a Bigsby-equipped version, and judging by the unfaded cherry finish underneath, it has been on the guitar since it was fairly new.

My friend Henry Olsen and I were recently comparing our ES-330s, and we noticed a dramatic tonal difference. We suspected that the mass of the Bigsby on my guitar was inhibiting the vibration of the top, so Henry suggested swapping back to a trapeze, and kindly provided a genuine 1963 item. Since the original tailpiece holes were still in place under the Bigsby plate, this seemed too good an opportunity to miss. As well as the three backplate screws that attach the assembly to the rim of the guitar, the Bigsby B7 has two extra screws that hold it against the top. Changing over simply involves unscrewing the Bigsby and screwing on the trapeze.

It seems we were right to attribute the differences in tone to the tailpiece, but I couldn't say that one was better than the other. With the trapeze the guitar sounded livelier, with a more acoustic character; high frequencies really cut through, but I felt there was a touch less sustain. With the Bigsby, the guitar sounded meatier in the midrange and was less inclined to feed back. So if you want a cleaner and more acoustic tone, stay with a trapeze – but if, like me, you'd prefer a rockier sound with better behaviour at high volume, it's



best to go with a Bigsby. The only change I made was swapping the old 7/8" spring with a 1" one for better vibrato action and playability.

Crossing the bridge

This guitar was made in 1961, so it's fitted with Gibson's ABR-1 Tune-O-Matic bridge. These bridges are not without their problems: some have even been pressed flat by string pressure over several decades. Although mine was undamaged, the metal saddles were completely worn out. The tops looked as if they had been filed flat and new string slots had been created, making the string spacing and radius uneven. I swapped to a modern Nashville bridge and the guitar's playability improved dramatically, but I wanted to keep the guitar as original as possible. There was only one thing for it; I needed a set of new string saddles. You can order replacements from various suppliers, but make sure you're getting the right type (later ES-330s had plastic saddles). Measure the position of the original saddles and note the orientation of each one; this will help you to get your intonation in the right ballpark straight away. The saddles are held in place by a wire clip; gently prise this out of its retaining holes without bending it, and remove the old saddles. The new ones should have exactly the same threads, so you can reuse the original screws. Roughly set the intonation according to your measurements, then pop the bridge back onto your guitar. New saddles probably won't have any string notches, so you'll have to cut them yourself. You might decide to open up the string spacing, if your fingerboard is wide enough – but if you make the slot dead centre on each saddle you can't go far wrong. I measured and marked each one very carefully and started the slots with a needle file before fine-tuning each one to match the string width using a set of nut files.

Shimming the bridge pickup may lose that hollow tone but the sound will be louder and better balanced

Conclusion

Just because a guitar is old, there's really no reason to compromise. Even the finest vintage guitars sometimes need a little bit of maintenance to play and sound their best. Although this was a time-consuming project, it actually cost very little and I think the results were well worth the effort... and rest assured, all those original bits are safely bagged up and stored in the case.'

9 The flattened pickguard in place

10 Note the original screw-holes for the old trapeze tailpiece

11 The replacement trapeze in place

12 Our original bridge with old saddles removed and a new set of home-reliced ones installed

DAVE GROHL'S TRINI LOPEZ

Not too many modern rockers opt to go semi-acoustic these days, but Dave Grohl is a notable exception. His vintage Trini Lopez Standard has appeared on every single Foo Fighters album and Grohl likes to claim that the guitar actually *is* the sound of the band. He found it in a guitar shop in Bethesda, Maryland when he was still touring with Nirvana in the early 90s. "I love the neck on the Trini Lopez," Grohl enthuses. "It feels gorgeous... just perfect for me, it sounds great and it's a beautiful guitar." These days Dave has a Gibson signature guitar based on his Trini, which serves for live duties, but the original is still his go-to instrument in the studio and it has been a significant component in making The Foo Fighters one of the biggest bands on the planet.

Photo: James Cumpsty

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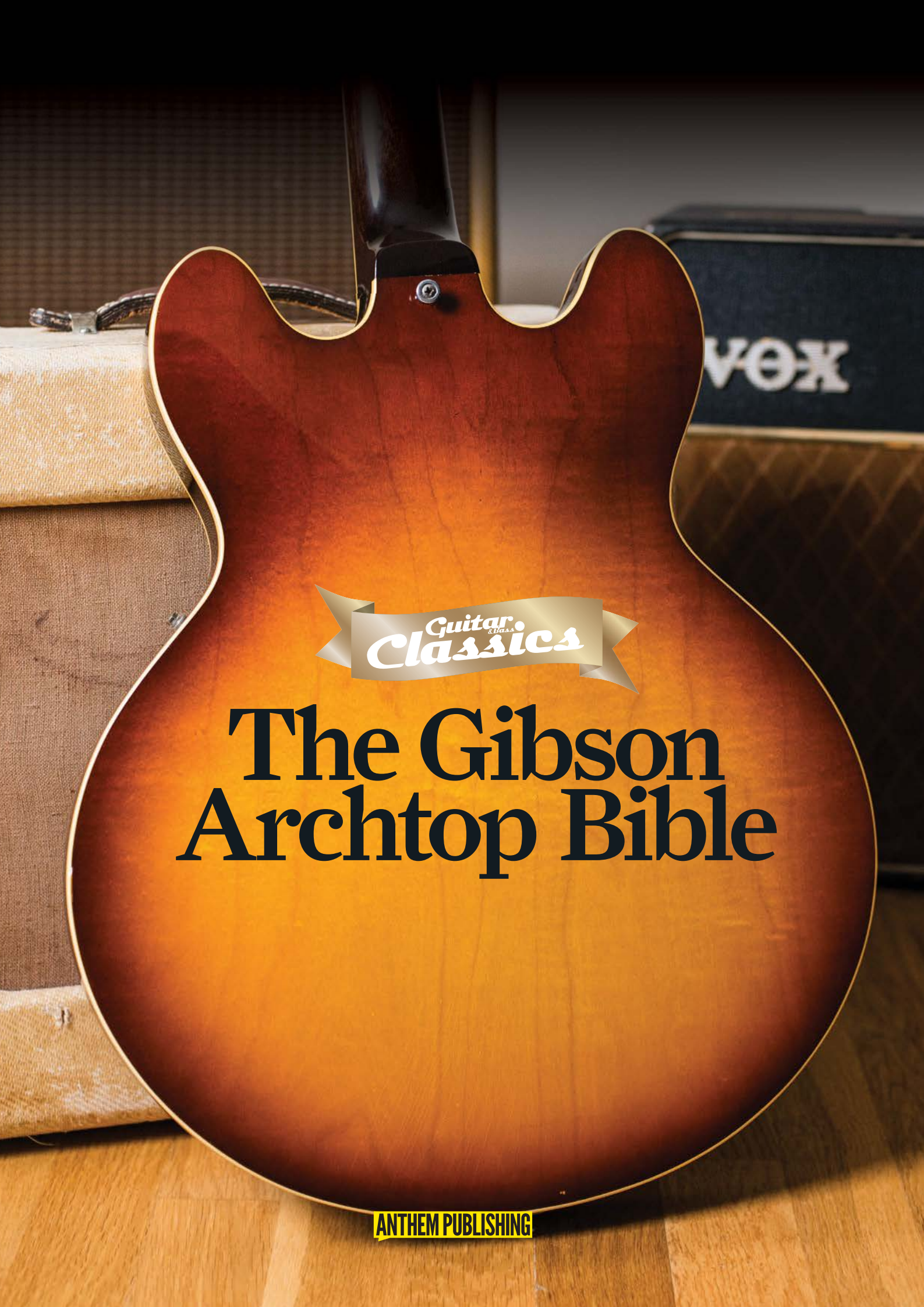
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